



Throwback: Rishi Kapoor's blast from the past interview.

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PUBLICATION

STARDUST

50

**Glorious Years
Of Stardust:
Explosive.
Scandalous &
Sensational...**

**Anupam Kher's
take on Stardust's
iconic journey**

**"I had gone to
FTII for film
appreciation
but working
with Irrfan Khan
was a learning
experience."
– Shailja Kejriwal**

REVEALED

**Why did Shah Rukh Khan take a hiatus
from films for two years?**

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Please write to stardustindiamagazine@gmail.com and give us your comments, suggestions, opinions, criticism and feedback. We have several new exciting things - from great articles, interviews, candid pictures and interactive competitions with great prizes in the offing, so watch this space for more...

50 Glorious Years Of Stardust

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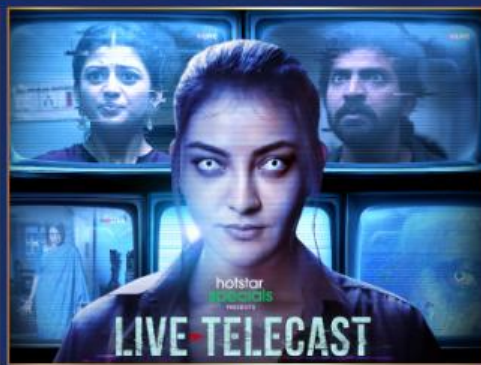
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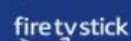
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"I was running Creative Unit which was a very successful advertising agency of its time. Shobhaa (De) was working for me as a copywriter. So I told her that we would start this out-of-the-box film magazine that would revolutionize film journalism because film magazines like Filmfare, Picture Post and Star 'N' Style at that point were deadly boring. For instance, they would have on their covers Nanda, Waheeda Rehman, Asha Parekh making sandcastles at Juhu.

So I wanted to start something that was totally different and so for the first issue I got the cover story from Anju Mahendru's mother and the cover headline was: Is Rajesh Khanna secretly married to Anju Mahendru? And this was done with Rajesh Khanna knowing what we were doing because he loved the publicity that went with it.

We ran the magazine from Creative Unit and then we took an office in the same neighbourhood at Agra building. I sat on one floor in the mezzanine and Shobhaa sat on the upper floor with Uma Rao and Ingrid Albuquerque. Binoy Thomas was also there at that time. So it started like that.

We were South Bombay kids and so stars didn't mean anything to us. So we picked on any and everybody.

We gave "our" names to the stars like we called Dharmendra "Garam Dharam", Hema Malini "Idli Malini", Shatrughan Sinha "Shotgun Sinha" and then later "Double Bore".

Shatrughan Sinha incidentally was the first star to visit us in the office because he was thrilled that we had put him on the cover. We always did the unusual – I remember while other publications put Dimple Kapadia on the cover, we put Anju Mahendru on the cover. ... so, everybody expected the unexpected from us. So obviously we shot up in circulation and left all the other magazines far behind.

The only competitor at that time was Star & Style. They had a very gossip column by Devyani Chaubal, but compared to our Neeta's Natter, it was very tame.

A lot of stars thought Neeta of Neeta's Natter was a real person. I remember I had thrown a party and Dharmendra asked me, "Where's Neeta"? He thought Neeta was an actual person. Neeta's Natter was just a generic term.

The name "Stardust" came out of the thin air. I just thought of the name and I had that logo in mind. I worked out the logo with the artist and the arch, which got really famous after that. Everybody identified the arch with Stardust so even though it cut into the headline, it didn't matter.

I made Shobhaa De, the Editor of Stardust. She was Shobha Rajyadaksha at that time, and quite a famous model. In fact, Kabir Bedi had asked her, "Why do you want to give up such a high income to go and work as an editor?" She said she was okay with that, she just wanted to work with us. Shobhaa was with us for the next 12 years. After that, Uma Rao took over from Shobhaa and was the editor for quite some time.. Then there was Vanita Ghosh and then Prochi Badshah who did a very good job. After that Nishi Prem and Farida Balsara were joint editors followed by Ashwin Varde and Omar Qureshi. Much later Ashwin was made Editorial director and then Sarita Tanwar and Omar became the next editors. Ashwin moved on and went on to become a producer in the industry. After Sarita and Omar, there was Sonali Jaffar and then Faheem Ruhani and Ram Kamal Mukherjee. After that Srividya and Suguna Sundaram were joint editors. The current editor is now Sumita Chakraborty.

Stardust always created an impact. I think one of our most controversial articles that shocked the industry was the Mamta Kulkarni cover. Then we wrote the story about Anupam Kher and he led a *morcha* which included stars like Shah Rukh Khan, Aditya Pancholi etc to the office. Of course, we sorted it out later. The third story would be when Amitabh (Bachchan) banned us. Our differences lasted for many years. But after he was in the hospital while filming Coolie, he met me at my house and we sorted out things and our "acquaintance" last till date. Another cover story on Aamir Khan also made headlines and that put us back on the map.

Did I ever think Stardust would become as iconic as it has become over the years? ... To tell you the truth? No. Because everybody told me it was stupid to start the magazine then because there was so much competition, right? But then Stardust arrived with a bang and it shot past the competition. This year we celebrate 50 Glorious Years Of Stardust and till date, we are head and shoulders above the rest."





Dear Readers

Roll the drums... it's celebration time. The iconic Stardust magazine celebrates 50 Glorious Years. Pioneered by Mr Nari Hira in 1971, Stardust magazine shocked, scandalised and thrilled the readers from the time of its inception. It was everything a film magazine of those times was not supposed to be...flippant, irreverent and fun! Its glossy pages had fabulous photographs of the stars and exclusive interviews. Stardust was bold and daring, and spilt the beans on juicy 'BTS' scandals, affairs and gossip of the film industry. It made boring trade sheet reporting passe, so no wonder, it became the biggest and the best film magazine of its time and shot past the competitors.

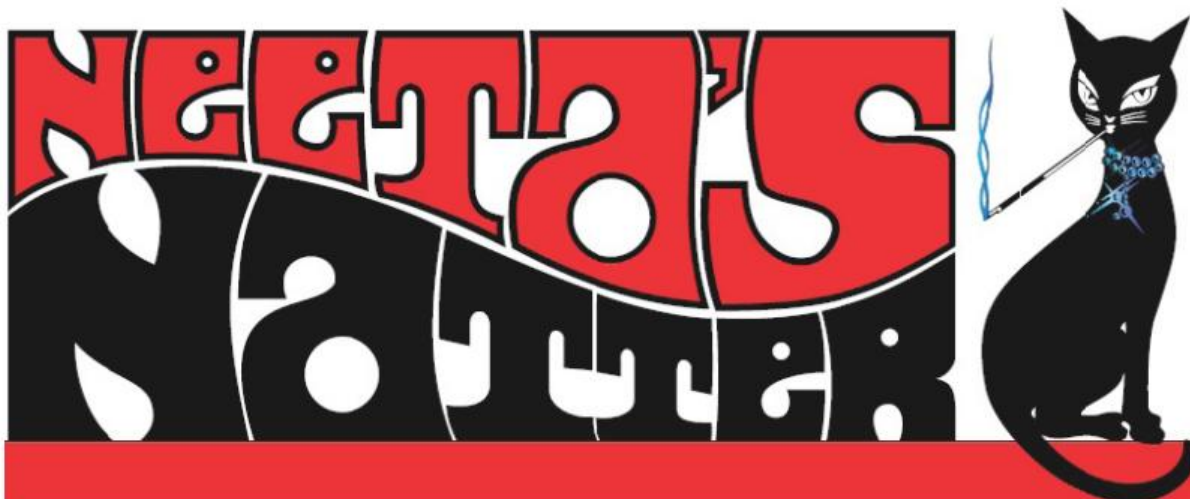
2021, and Stardust remains the number one magazine. As the Editor of this iconic magazine, I'd like to thank each and every one of our readers for being with us throughout our eventful journey. We promise you Stardust will always be the first magazine to get you all the exclusives of the film industry.

In this exciting issue of January 2021, Anupam Kher looks back with nostalgia at Stardust and his eventful journey. In our cover story we delve into why the great Shah Rukh Khan was missing in action from films for two years.

Besides this, we flip through the pages of time to the super candid late Rishi Kapoor's Blast from the past interview. ...And of course, there's loads of fun stuff too – from interviews, gossip, star fashion and so much more...

But this is not all, this entire year we are going to celebrate in a big way. So stay with us as you always did and enjoy!

Sumita Chakraborty



For all you romantic dudes who are waiting with bated breath about some 'engaging' news on the Katrina Kaif – Vicky Kaushal front, here's a little gem though it was a trifle difficult to get it. Moreso, since our dear Kat believes in romancing only behind the iron curtain (literally), so not even a meow leaks out. But hey, we are masters at digging out juicy affairs, so a bit of snooping around got us this li'l natter. Supposedly for the New Year, Katrina along with her sister Isabel and Vicky along with his faithful younger bro Sunny met up at a romantic villa in Alibaug for some peace 'n' quiet and perhaps, a bit of TLC . Well, nothing much is known about this closed-door weekend meeting. ...Perhaps they were just talking about films?

Talking about films, Salman Khan seems to be garnering a lot of trolling. Whether it is the trailer of his brother-in-law Ayush Sharma's film 'Antim' or his "teacher" avatar as *Bigg Boss* host, the Sultan is getting a thumbs down from all quarters. ...Maybe he's just hit by the raging "insiders-outsiders" debate? Or has the tiger lost his bite?



Talking about Tiger, Tiger Shroff's new single *Casanova* has gone viral. And, how? Not only is he looking super cool showing off his eight packs, he sings pretty well too. ...Is there anything this man can't do?

Girlfriend Disha Patani is obviously super stoked with her gorgeous Tiger. And ya, she's making sure the family is happy too. Last seen she was on a dinner date with mamma Ayesha and Tiger's sister Krishna who by the way broke up with her long-time beau. Ah well, a family that eats together, stays together!





Well, poor Varun Dhawan sure has lost his Midas touch. After eight back-to-back hits, one *Kalank* has practically tarred his track record. And to add to the injury, *Coolie No 1* directed by his dad David Dhawan has failed to do magic at the Box office. Though Amazon Prime refused to share figures, supposedly, David has lost a bit of money on his labour of love for his son. A li'l bird told us that he's blaming it on the promotions of the movie but we say, he should have focussed on the script. The script (if you can call it that) of *Coolie No 1* was jaded, used and abused and totally irrelevant. Varun deserves better.

2021 saw two lovebirds coming out of the closet at last. That's right Kiara Advani and beau Sidharth Malhotra scooted off to the azure islands of Maldives to have some quality time. Shutterbugs caught them at the airport trying to quietly sneak out under their noses. But once caught, they sportingly smiled for the paparazzi.



Anushka and Virat Kohli had some good news too. They are now the proud parents of a baby girl. And before the paparazzi go the 'Taimur' way with their little darling, Anushka and Virat sent a host of gifts to them requesting them to avoid clicking their baby's pictures.

Talking about Taimur, memes going viral have got the little munchkin into the spotlight again. Though they jokingly claim that now with Anushka and Virat's daughter in the scene, Taimur's career as wonder child is over. ...But naah, we don't think so, Taimur will always remain number 1.





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Saif Ali Khan has seriously become the king of the web world. His popular *Sacred Games* was lauded by the public and the audience. But now his *Tandav*, a political drama on Disney+Hotstar, is raking in the bouquets and the praise. By the way, supposedly, Saif shot at his Pataudi Palace for this web-series. No wonder, everything looks so regal.



By the way, another actor getting rave reviews is none other than Dimple Kapadia. According to many including daughter Twinkle who proudly posts a review, Dimple has out-staged Saif Ali Khan. Nice! She's a brilliant actor and should have got her dues a long time ago. But we guess, better late than never.

Thankfully, Hrithik Roshan has announced his next film *Fighter* after a long hiatus. It was a double whammy actually for it was his birthday and the film was announced on the same day. So it was celebrations all the way.



Who was most excited about this film was none-other than our Dippy? That's right Deepika Padukone just couldn't keep her mouth or tweets shut because she was overwhelmed with excitement. Hrithik had to shush her to be quiet until the film was finally announced. Ah yes, after all that bad publicity, thankfully things are going great with our fave gal finally.

It is that time of the year again.

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Hrithik's ex-wife Sussanne was also in the news some time back though not for the greatest of reasons. She along with Suresh Raina and Guru Randhawa were supposedly booked after the police raided a club at a suburban hotel. They were at a birthday party and the police claimed that they had violated Covid norms. Sussanne, however, insisted she had not been arrested. The police just asked the guests to wait for the next three hours while they sorted matters with the club.

There's good news for Randeep Hooda... remember him? Well, the man has resurfaced at last and news filtering in insist he's got a dream role in a web-series called *Inspector Avinash*, a hard-hitting cop caper. Chalo, it will be great to see Randeep again!



Ankita Lokhande got pretty nostalgic on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, the festival of kites. In a video posted on her social media on the occasion, she was filmed flying kites while the background music was of *Kai Po Che*, Sushant Singh Rajput's debut film. "I got goosebumps," she said a little teary-eyed. ...So did we!



By the way Ranbir Kapoor too celebrated Lohri on the sets of Luv Ranjan's next film with Shraddha Kapoor in super cold Delhi. But the actor looked fresh and vibed pretty well with his co-star Shraddha and director Luv Ranjan. Looks like he's enjoying the *Dilli ki sardi* a lot!

Talking about Shraddha, she's been praising her brother Sidhant's singing skills to the skies. In fact, ask her about it and she just can't stop gushing over her bhai and his singing. We admit we haven't heard Sidhant sing but going with what Shraddha says, we are sure he must be really good. Perhaps even better than his acting?



There's this cute throwback picture of Sara Ali Khan doing the 'rounds of her trying to shave dad Saif Ali Khan's beard. The picture is of a cute little roly poly Sara seriously trying to get papa Saif's attention by shaving him while the proud dad looked straight into the camera grinning away at his munchkins antics. Sara at that age sure could give little Taimur serious competition.



Cat's Crown

This month goes to...

Goes to Akshay Kumar who spent time playing volleyball with the army personnel on Army Day. Not only that he posted a picture of that on his social media with a motivational message for the army. Good work Akshay!

Cover Story



Why Did Shah Rukh Khan Go Missing From the Silver Screen For Two Years?

He's the undisputed king of Bollywood and so when SRK goes 'MIA' (missing in action) on screen for two years, **Sumita Chakraborty** wonders why?

Whenever you think of power-packed ardent love peppered with filmi *junoon* and *tamasha* ... you think of... that's right - the King of romance - the *Badshah* of Tinsel Town - Shah Rukh Khan. This man has indeed redefined love stories in the celluloid space like never before.

Right? Who can forget the amazingly charming Raj from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* who travelled half the world to find his beloved Simran? Or his droolworthy romantic avatar in *Dil Toh Pagal Hain*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hain* and so many other films. Indeed, Shah Rukh Khan has been part 'n' parcel of most girl's fantasy and remains the eternal lover for many Bollywood bingers.

Romance may be his forte, but he has excelled in every other genre too... So of course, he has had a dream run at the Box office with huge hits and blockbusters that have spanned several decades. Accolades, bouquets of praises, commercial and critical acclaim have kissed his path throughout his long career. He has been heralded as the Number 1 actor in India leaving the other Khans and even the formidable Mr Bachchan behind. At one point, it looked as if his popularity over the years would never wane at all. But then again, the law of averages had to catch up with him too.



And it did! If you look at his career graph, things haven't been that hunky dory in the past five years or so.

In fact, the downslide had already begun. His coming-of-age film *Dear Zindagi* opposite Alia Bhatt directed by Gauri Shinde was liked by many but couldn't ring in the box office collections like his films tended to do. In 2017, his film *Raees* didn't exactly get the crowds flocking to the cinema halls. To top that, in the consequent year, *Fan* and *Jab Harry Met Sejal* crashed at the Box office. To add salt to injury, his last release *Zero* in 2019 didn't set the Box office on fire, which was a pity because after the past duds, Shah Rukh was really banking on this Aanand L Rai's ambitious project. But unfortunately for the SRK team, *Zero* got almost a zero response from the audience.

“Unfortunately for the SRK team, *Zero* got almost a zero response from the audience.”

In the film world, an actor is always used to the many upheavals that come his or her way. After all, it's a

known fact that every actor's destiny hangs precariously every Friday with the changing whimsical Box office. ...And all the superstars have had their tryst with failure so it's something that they have had to live with.

SRK has been in the industry from 1988 so he too is well acquainted with the deadly roulette games of Friday fortunes. But with *Zero*, Shah Rukh had really got his hopes up not only because he had a super performing role but also director Aanand L Rai's last few films including *Tanu Weds Manu* were blockbusters as well as were critically acclaimed too.

However, it all came to a naught when it crashed at the blockbust-er. And according to whispers within his team, the dismal results of his pet project had really shaken up SRK.



But that's Bollywood for you. So one did expect the great SRK who is known for his positive outlook to bounce out of this. But to the bewilderment of his fans, Shah Rukh didn't sign a single film after this. No worries, his admirers and friends said, he was just going through scripts and would soon announce a project - that was in mid 2018... The entire 2019 went by without any SRK film being announced. Pretty shocking as Shah Rukh had his film launches spaced out at regular periods before. What added to the shock waves was when wife Gauri Khan commented in jest on his long hiatus from the film industry. She said, "He is not doing a film, will ask him to keep designing as second option."

His wife's tongue-in-cheek dig however did not even dent SRK's impenetrable armour because he continued to do what he was doing - nothing. In fact in an interview to a magazine, Shah Rukh Khan confessed, "I have no films right now... I just felt I should take out time out, watch films, listen to stories and read more books."

**"He is not doing a film, will ask him to keep designing as second option."
– Gauri Khan**

Shocking! Why was SRK lying low? Failure wasn't new to him though of course for the many decades he has ruled the film world, he's seen spectacular success and has climbed the ladder right to the top. Perhaps he had mellowed with age and instead of working back-to-back which he had done before, he preferred to take time out to enjoy the fruits of his success with the ones he loved.



In another interview, he averred, "I have no film with me right now. I am not working on any film. Usually what happens is when your one film is coming to an end, you begin work on your next film and I get involved within 3-4 months. But this time I am just not feeling like. My heart doesn't allow me to, I just felt that I should rather take time out, watch films, listen to stories and read more books. Even my kids are in their college stage, my daughter is going to college and my son is about to finish his studies. ...So I just want to spend more time with my family."

At the Melbourne Film Festival SRK further announced when fielding the million-dollar question of why he hadn't announced any project for so long? He said, "I'm not even discovering. I will just do a film that comes into my heart. I have always been like this. People don't believe it because you reach a certain status and people think that oh there must be going a lot of thought into this and he must be planning this. But I am not planning. I have never planned it.

"I am working on a lot of stories and films to make for production. And it's nice not to have the stress of writing a film for me."

- SRK

I am just happy that I've time to come to Melbourne. I will go down and spend some time with my daughter in New York. ...Go to Trinidad and Tobago to watch some cricket match. It's not like I am holidaying. I'm really working hard. But I am working on a lot of stories and films to make for production. And it's nice not to have the stress of writing a film for me."



Fair enough... thought his fans. After all, their superstar too was human even though they idolised him like a God. Early 2020 too went by without any announcement from SRK. And then of course, the dreaded pandemic hit the world and the new norm enveloped a total lockdown. So of course, one didn't expect any kind of film announcement from any of the stars especially as theatres were closed and there was a boom on the OTT front. But most actors, from Salman to Aamir were working on scripts at home and as soon as the lockdown was lifted, they announced their respective films. The *Sultan* of course despite a Covid scare within his household continued to work as host for his reality show Bigg Boss with of course all safety precautions. He also launched his brother-in-law Ayush Sharma's film *Antim*, worked on his own film *Radhe* and reportedly even had meetings on the third edition of YRF's Tiger series. Aamir too was working on his film *Lal Singh Chaddha* a take-off from *Forest Gump*. But there was cold silence from the SRK front.

The whispers reached a crescendo: why was SRK missing in action from the film world? What was wrong? Was something amiss with the 55-year-old actor? Why was he not announcing a single project? Thankfully, fed up of giving a reason and an explanation to the media, SRK at last announced in the middle of January 2021 that he had started shooting for his next film to be helmed by *War* director Siddharth Anand. The film is an action-packed thriller and is called *Pathan* ... and is being produced by Yash Raj Films.

“I will just do a film that comes into my heart.”

Not only that, supposedly the dreaded SRK hiatus had finally come to an end. According to sources, Shah Rukh Khan is expected to be seen in five films in 2021. He is in talks with Rajkumar Hirani for a socio-comic film, South director Atlee for a potboiler, and *Bharat* director Ali Abbas Zafar and directors Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK of *The Family Man* fame for two films.

“The good thing is from here there is only one way to move that is upwards, higher and better places.” - SRK

In SRK's New Year post on Instagram, he said: “I am late in conveying my wishes to all of you and I am sure everyone will agree 2020 has been the worst year for everybody. And in this awful times, it is difficult to find a ray of hope, positivity. But I have a way of looking at bad, difficult days, awful years.” Adding, “I believe when one is at their lowest, bottomest of their life, the good thing is from here there is only one way to move that is upwards, higher and better places.” ...Nice! Here's hoping the fabulous SRK envelops the celluloid world with his indomitable mojo and more of his films get released this year, and of course, he gets back his super-duper Midas touch back again. So *kya* Shah Rukh Khan *ka* magic *phir chalega*? Only time will tell... For now, we are keeping our fingers crossed!

50 Glorious Years

//

Stardust is not just a magazine, it also gave birth to a lot of creativity, people and milestones."

- Anupam Kher



He is truly iconic and a brilliant actor. *Sumita Chakraborty* caught up with one of India's best actors Anupam Kher who has had a very interesting relationship with Stardust which spans 36 years and more. Here, he talks about his bond with Stardust and its numerous interesting twists and turns.

When was the first time you got to know about Stardust magazine?

I used to read it long time back in summer school and then I came to Bombay. Like any other juicy information that your mind wanders to find out about, Stardust too was one of them. It was glamorous and it had some great pictures and very good interviews.

Your debut in Bollywood with *Saransh* was impactful. What about your debut feature in *Stardust*, do you remember it?

I don't remember it that way. After *Saransh* was released, I was talked about, I remember there used to be some mention about me. And then I think at some stage, there was an interview done by who I won't remember because it was a long time back. Stardust always had an element of salt and pepper in it and one had to be very careful about what one said.

Ah yes... I believe you have some problems with Stardust at one time. I've heard of stories of all the stars including you coming to the Stardust Cat-house at Magna house and doing a *morcha*. Is it true? What exactly happened?

You must be knowing about it... you're the Editor of Stardust.

Yes... But what exactly happened?

I don't think it's important to talk about things which were not very pleasant. I think we have moved on so what happened, happened long time ago. We were young and full of josh. But we sorted it out. Mr Hira was really gracious about it and he gave me a five-page article after that. But I think we

should leave it behind. We are celebrating 50 years of Stardust and so we should talk about the good moments rather than the twists and turns. In any kind of relationship, there are many ups and downs. But we are celebrating the Golden Jubilee, right? So let's not go into that for if we do, it will be only be remembered for that.



No, no... not at all. ...Because it is like a sweet and sour relationship which has existed for many years...

There is a beautiful sher (poem) Jiss afsana ko anjam tak lana na mumkin usse ikk khubsurat mod de kar chhodna achha.



Lovely! 50 years of Stardust is truly iconic. What do you have to say about this?

Well, I'll say Stardust is not just a magazine, it also gave birth to a lot of creativity, people and milestones. Hiba films was a pioneer – I wish somebody had continued with it. In today's time I would want Stardust to go digital. I would like to change it with times. I would want Stardust to reinvent itself in the digital world than just remain a monthly. I think it will do very well. Stardust is iconic. If you come out with things like what happened this time, this year, you'd have immense fresh and original content. Stardust should be absolutely be in the world of digital. It should not be just remembered as a nostalgia; it should move with the times. The format is really very interesting, and it will catch on definitely in the digital world.

What about you? How has your journey been in the film industry?

It has been fabulous. I'm the son of a forest department clerk. And in my 36 years, I have done 518 films in all languages all over the world. I have won a number of awards including the Stardust Millenium award which is mentioned in my bio data. The industry has been very kind to me. I'm one of those privileged ones who based on his hard work and honesty, have survived. And I would like to believe I'm still happening. I'm doing so many things. I have an acting school, which is flourishing touchwood. I do work abroad. I work in India. I wrote three books and the third one is a bestseller. It's called 'Today Is Your Best Day' and it came out one month ago. What else one wants from God?

What about Hindi films - it also has changed quite a bit over the years?

Everything changes. The world changes so cinema had to change, right? My grandmother used to cook on a *chulha*. My mother cooked on the gas. Today we have microwaves, right? Everything changes so obviously, cinema had to change too.

So how does an actor manage to be relevant in these changing times? You are relevant... so how do you manage to do what you are doing?

The fear of failure tends to make us compromise so we become mediocre. If we don't have fear of failure, then the sky's the limit, then you can do anything in the world. But today, films is not my life. It's a part of my life. I'm like a carpenter. I'm doing my job. And yet I'm one of those lucky ones who has enjoyed the pre-digital era.

I just shot with Mithun Chakraborty and we were talking about how at that time we had that connection. There were no mobile vans and cellphones. There was no entourage with you – PR teams, managers etc. During that time we made relationships which I'm sure isn't happening these days. I'm sure there are so many other things happening today. You can only be relevant if you reinvent yourself as a person from time to time. You can lie to the world but don't lie to yourself.



You are also an actor who has made an impact even abroad, even in Hollywood? The last time I spoke to you, you were in Ireland shooting? So you are one Indian actor who has made India extremely proud. So how has this journey been from India to abroad to Hollywood?

You can only do that if you are a trained actor. Training and education give you the courage to try out anything. I personally believe that trained actors can be relevant anywhere in the world. But we have started giving importance to training five to seven years back? You know that solid base of theatre – I was in the film institute – that solid training gives you confidence. It also gives you education which opens up your eyes. And it comes down to the same thing that I am not scared of failure. There's a beautiful line by Osho which says if you try and you risk failure, then you don't ensure it. Right? At a very young age, my father told me that failure is an event, never a person. So it is our own fear, which makes us mediocre, which sort of says that let me not get on to different territories, I did not have any such fear. And somehow when I'm working abroad, I feel in my mind, I'm representing my country and it's a matter of pride for me. After every shot, I tell myself that my country should be proud of me so that even after I finish the film or project, they remember me. So luckily for me, all the projects that I did not only did commercially well, it also did critically well. Whether it was Bend It Like Beckham, The Silver Linings Playbook or a British show that I did, New Amsterdam... it all became popular.

These times, a lot has been spoken about nepotism. But you're one person who came from the outside and you've made an impact. And, there's never has been anything called nepotism in your life.

...Because when you are well equipped with what you've learned, you're not dependent on anything. That is what I've told Sikander too. He's slowly doing things on his own.

But I don't hold that against people whose parents want to do something for their children. Why not? They will not survive if the people do not like them. Not every director, producer, actors' child has been successful. But we can't hold it against parents who want to do something for their children. A hotelier wants his son or daughter to be like him likewise a doctor or anybody from any other profession. But that doesn't mean there is no space for people from the outside. End of the day it's your work that matters. I am a prime example of a completely outsider based on his work and hard work, I have managed to reach this far.



Lastly, any message for Stardust and our readers?

I have a message for Stardust - reinvent. It's a great journey you've been on, here's wishing you many more. It's great you've survived for 50 years. Now-a-days, things don't survive even for a few months. So it's great. I'd like to congratulate you and all the other editors. And of course, Mr Hira who has been the pioneer of cinema journalism. Congratulations! Break: "It is our own fear, which makes us mediocre, which sort of says that let me not get on to different territories, I did not have any such fear."

Get Snappy

Anushka Sharma



“Everybody Should Take Pride In Whatever They Do!”

There’s something so refreshing about Anushka Sharma. She’s independent, smart and extremely confident about her abilities. In a throwback interview with Twinkle Dedhia, the vivacious and outspoken Anushka talks about films and more.

What do you think makes your film *Sui Dhaaga* relatable yet unique?

It’s focusing on dignity of labour which never had been addressed by mainstream Bollywood. When you have a lack of exposure, anybody can take you for a ride. Anybody can tell you something and you might end up believing it. They go through that time where they are very trusting. They are seeing the world the way they are and they realize how the world really works when people take their advantage. Despite all that, they decide to stand on their own feet and fight against it. This film isn’t about self-pity. It’s not about ki humare saath itna kharab ho raha hai and they are just waiting for miracles to take place. They decide to take the difficult route which is let fear take a backseat and to go for it.

Tell us about the essence of your character? In the trailer she seems very confident yet mild. Please elaborate!

In today’s world confidence is equal to arrogance; they don’t possess that kind of superficial confidence. In Mamta’s and Mauji’s case, they are extremely confident people but it’s not very apparent in the movie. Their confidence comes in their actions and not just diction. They prove it in their deeds and that is what I find beautiful. So Mamta despite the way she appears from the outside like she might seem very submissive or not a strong character but she stands up for herself and her husband. She’s ready to face the world because her husband is wronged. She thinks that if both of them are together then they can tackle the world. She has a strong core and her idea of relationship is very

impactful even though it's old school. Her strength, the way she expresses her emotions and the respect and support they have for one another is really admirable.

How did you prepare for your role?

For me, embroidery was very therapeutic. I have seen my mother and grandmother do it while growing up. So somewhere, I was really aware of their body language. As an actor, you are always very observant. However to really get needle and start stitching was quite an art. Sewing was easy but embroidery was completely new to me. I picked it up quite fast though because I enjoyed it. In fact, I kept doing it on-sets and in the middle of the shots as well.

Can you tell us about your equation with Varun's character in the film?

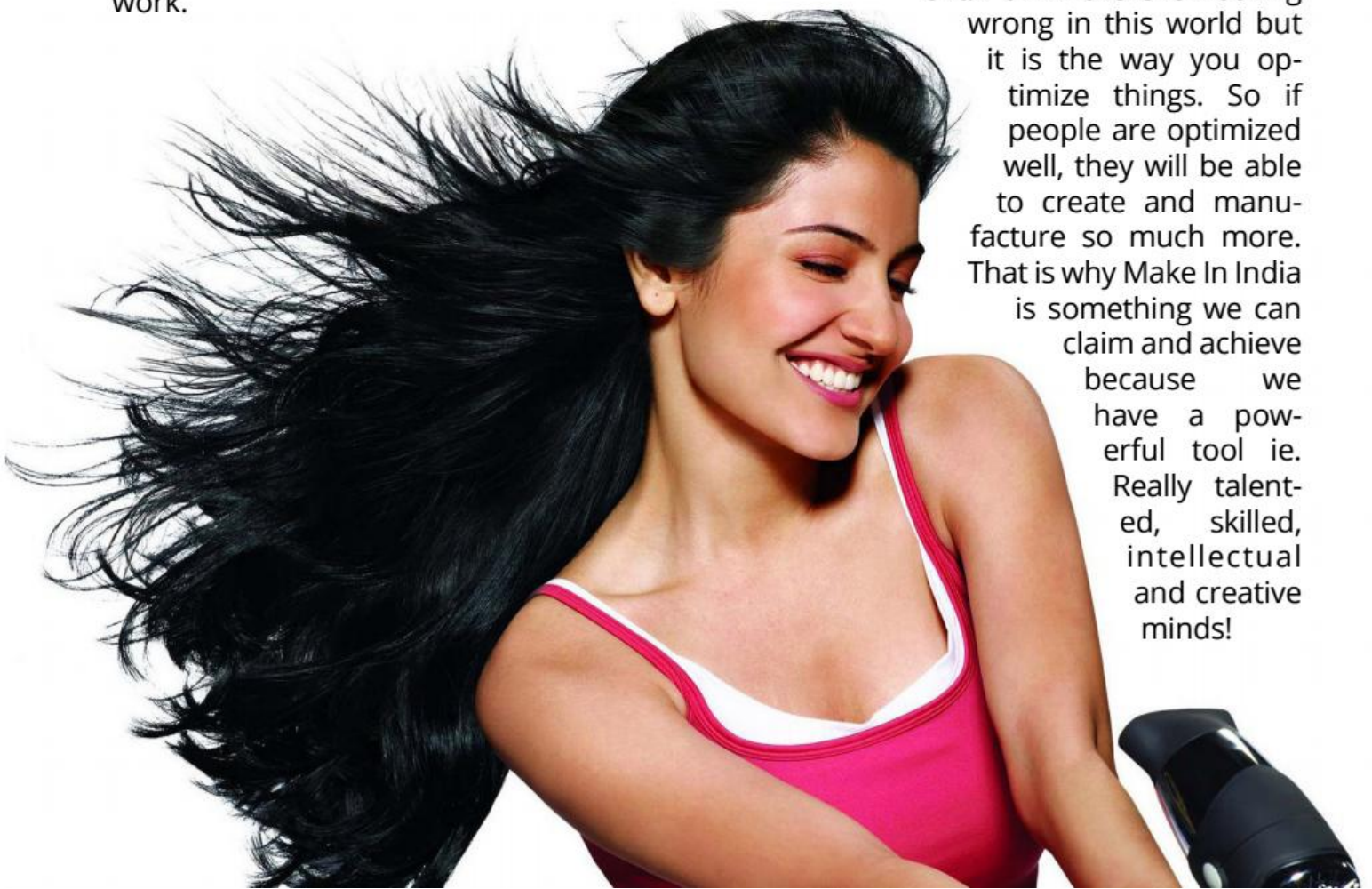
Actually, their romance is very subtle and almost invisible in the film. In the realm of normalcy, it's a very domestic life for her. He wakes up in the morning, brushes his teeth, has his nashta and he leaves for work.

He returns home at night so they don't really get to spend any extra romantic time. They just get married and start living this life. Also they stay in a joint family set-up toh you are so busy in a sense where many unsaid things are taken for granted amidst a married couple. There is always some house-hold work that's pulling them apart but this one incident takes place in their life which actually brings them together. Through the journey of this film, they find respect for one another. With their struggle and self-reliance, they discover love which wasn't present initially. They end up spending time with each other which they never could earlier. There are no forged signs of intimacy for no reason at all. Even holding hands is such a big ordeal for them which you will see in the movie. (smiles)

What are your thoughts on 'Make In India' products?

You got to take advantage of our positives which is our workforce. It arises from the fact that we are such a populated country. Let's think about how to use it to your benefit!

I think there is nothing wrong in this world but it is the way you optimize things. So if people are optimized well, they will be able to create and manufacture so much more. That is why Make In India is something we can claim and achieve because we have a powerful tool i.e. Really talented, skilled, intellectual and creative minds!



After doing such glamorous roles, what compelled you to choose this script?

It is the dignity of labour for me. It was the fact that no job is superior or inferior. Today, I feel that the job I'm doing is important but I'm fooling myself if I act like the only privileged artiste on earth all the time. I will be worth nothing if I don't have people around me doing what they are doing. So, one has to understand the significance of everybody's job and their interdependence on one another. Somewhere we lose that equality of that chain of thought. We don't take dignity in what we do because we feel hum jo kar rahe hai woh thik hai par woh joh kar raha hai hume woh karna hai. I would say everybody should take pride in whatever they do. You will see a lot of people who are at very privileged positions in life not taking pride in what they do. For me, film touches a point of being passionate about what you do irrespective of societal opinion on it which is really a powerful message.



Get Snappy



“

An outsider might have to knock the door twice, but it's no reason to be less hopeful.”
– Ankit Rathi

|

A good actor and a dedicated worker, Ankit Rathi has made a niche for himself in the Hindi film industry. Of course, the path is still with thorns and he has miles to go but with his perseverance and zeal, Ankit is sure to reach his goals. Read on... as Ankit talks about his films, struggle, being an outsider and more....

Ankit you've been around for two years in the Hindi film industry, how has the journey been?

Actually, it's been eight years now. I did a cameo in *Fukrey* which was in the year 2013 after that I had a small part in *Singham Returns* as well. Farhan Akhtar gave me my first break in *3 storeys* where I shared the screen with Richa Chadha, Pulkit Samrat, Renuka Sahane and Sharman Joshi. So, from doing commercials to being an AD and then films, it has been a good ride.

Tell us about your film and your character?

Bolo Hau is a love story set in Hyderabad. My character is Salman, who's madly in love and knows no boundaries. It is a fun, light hearted rom-com which i'm sure all will enjoy. With catchy songs, romance, humour and drama we are sure the film will give the viewers a wholesome experience, just like a perfect family entertainer.



Since it's the raging topic, what is your opinion about this "insiders versus outsiders" debate?

Yes, of course, it's a very ignited topic these days, but the fact is that it's not a new thing, it's always been this way. But I firmly believe that it's all about doing justice to your job at the end of the day. An outsider might have to knock the door twice, but it's no reason to be less hopeful.

Any more projects in the pipeline?

I'm reading a script for a web show. What I am looking for is something that is different from what I've previously done. I might share the news soon.

Lastly, when you look back at your journey, is there anything you want to change?

I mean, if I say I wouldn't want to change a few things about my journey, I would be lying. But I think those are just learnings, which wouldn't have come otherwise.



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Court Martial

“When Star Bestsellers started – that’s when I met Anurag Kashyap, Anurag Basu, Raju Hirani, Imtiaz Ali and so many talented people, because we were all starting out at that time.”
– Shailja Kejriwal.

She’s fanatically passionate about her work and eats, drinks and lives it at all times. Meet the super talented Shailja Kejriwal who talks to **Sumita Chakraborty**, Chief Creative Officer - Zee Special Projects, who talks about her foray into television, working with Raju Hirani, Anurag Kashyap, Imtiaz Ali and so many more talented people, her film *Madaari*, lessons Irrfan Khan taught her and much more...





Hi Shailja, let me start with: Since Stardust is celebrating 50 glorious years, let me ask you if you have any memories or association with this iconic magazine?

I remember growing up reading Stardust. I remember when I first started reading Stardust, my mother whacked me. She used to yell at us and say, "You are too young to read *Stardust*." So, we used to hide it and read it. (Ha ha). So this interview is going to be first sent to my mother.

How did you start?

I'm from Kolkata. Born and brought up in Kolkata, grew up there, went to Jadavpur University studied Comparative Literature. And then for the longest time I was in research and also did a bit of teaching. Those days reading was a part of life as there wasn't so much of television as it was in the late '70s and '80s. So life was more about reading books and stuff like that and to be very honest, I took up literature thinking this is going to be an extension of my



Shailja, you have been called a pioneer and a genius in content and storytelling? How did you start to this journey?

I don't agree with this terminology of being called a genius etc... No, I'm not being humble. I've always felt that if you feel strongly about something, and you express it through your work... number one, it's a privilege and number two, it's your job to do that as an artist and a creative person. ...That's what I've been trying to do - having an opinion and expressing it. Basically, sometimes it resonates with a large section of viewers, sometimes it does not, ... and that is what gets termed as a hit or flop.

hobby. My father would say become a Doctor or an engineer... you're just studying story books... so why am I sending you to college? (Laughs)

Everybody at that time thought what would come out of studying Literature except of course to become a teacher? But from childhood, stories were a very important part of my life. This whole theme of storytelling through plays was a hobby for the longest time.

Then the opportunity came up to do something for Doordarshan for some work from Bangla to Hindi. And I was like - this is amazing. So I started from there. And then the bug

bit me and I started writing. From there after which I got into line production. Then I decided that there's not too much of Hindi work happening in Kolkata and I wanted to express myself in Hindi so that's what brought me to Bombay. I had a lot of good friends in Bombay from FTII and so they suggested that I should look for writing work and that got me to Star. I knew Mr Rathikant Basu who had been The Director General at Doordarshan and was now in Star. He was always appreciative of my work so I met him at Star and fortunately, he remembered me, which was quite crazy. He asked me to join Star but I told him that I was doing my research at the university and I just wanted to write. But he told me there is no writing job at Star but do join and suddenly, it seemed like an adventure. I said, why not? Let me think about it. But then, within the next day or two, we met once more in the office and I decided to join. I was this lowly person in the commissioning department. (laughs). And the commissioning department at the time comprised of just one person and that was me so I wasn't sure how senior or junior I was. (Laughs)

What did your job at Star entail?

Well, let me tell you about my tryst with the commissioning department - I was taken into a room where they were like floor to ceiling VHS tapes - there must have been almost 400-500 tapes lying on the floor. There were pilots of shows. I was told that I had to sift through all of them to decide what to put on air. Star very kindly gave me a video player and television set at my house. I was very excited because this is what I would love to do in any case, and I was also getting paid for it. In fact, I would have done it for free. And that was a big high for me. So I sat at the fifth floor and sifted through the pilots, and that was a great learning experience. Being from Kolkata, I didn't know anybody or anything about Bombay at the time but going through all those pilots gave me an indication of who was who and who was involved with what, etc. And then, obviously, one had to interact with all these people. So I think being there or being given that job, even though it was the most unwanted job probably at that time in Star, for me, it was very fortunate because that gives me an idea about

who was making what kind of stories and it was really something that helped me find my position in the industry.

Truly amazing, so how did your pet project Star Bestsellers start?

Then from there, I did my first show for Star Bestsellers. This was also a quirk of fate. A lot of things have happened in my life by chance

"I've always felt that if you feel strongly about something, and you express it through your work... number one, it's a privilege and number two, it's your job to do that as an artist and a creative person."

- simply because I was at the right place at the right time. After I took on the job at Star - picking it up was a lark and my father told my mother that she'll be back in Kolkata in six months. But I am still here.

Well what happened was that there was a kind of a change of management and we had to suddenly within seven or eight months of

my being there give a presentation to the Murdochs on what was it that the programming team wanted to do? And again, it was by chance, because my background was Literature the only thing that I thought overnight was a series of short stories. That was my supposedly bright idea which I thought would get shot down in one second. But it got approved. And I said, "Wow, okay!" And that's how Star Bestsellers started – that's when I met Anurag Kashyap, Anurag Basu, Raju Hirani, Imtiaz

it was for new talent and newcomers. So it was great collaborating, working, learning, and doing stuff because for everybody, it was something new. That was the most exciting phase and again, it happened by chance. But it was very good for a whole lot of people and then they went on ahead to make films and so forth. We all started out together, we kept in touch, we learned a lot from each other so for me, it was the best beginning that I could have had.



Ali and so many talented people, because we were all starting out at that time. They were all new – Anurag was writing, Raju Hirani was editing – so Star Bestsellers became like a Godsend for a whole lot of people with new talent. For me too, it was very interesting, because I stuck to my guns of working with new talent and at one point, it did become extremely popular. We did have a lot of very senior people also being interested to be making Bestsellers but we politely told them that

What was next?

After that I became Head of programming which continued upto 2007. We did all kinds of shows – the fortunate part was that we were growing with the growth of television and so there was a lot of scope to experiment because no one knew what would work, what wouldn't because there wasn't a history of what would work or what to add. ...So it was such an exciting time because no specific rule hadn't solidified as yet... the pandits hadn't too jumped onboard as yet. Now, we know what works, so the norm is let's make more of that.

For how long were you at Star TV? And what made you decide to write *Madaari*?

What started happening was by 2006-2007, we had done so much. We had the top-most shows which were doing really well and we were on the top. There is this saying - why fix something when it ain't broke? But when it ain't broke, it's also repetitive. And that becomes boring after a point especially for a person like me.

I decided I was a bit restless. I didn't want to do whatever I was doing. Television after a point gets repetitive. In the beginning, when you're starting off, everything is interesting because you're doing everything for the first time but after a point, when you see success, it is actually the biggest problem. The decision to leave was not easy. It was not about changing organizations; it was about not doing the kind of work that is being done. But at that time, I couldn't handle it beyond a point. There was nothing much more I could do. So I left.

But after leaving Star, I went through a couple of years of introspection as to what is it that I want to do? Obviously, I didn't want to do more of the same thing at that point. That was the time that the idea of *Madaari* popped up in my head and I sat down and wrote it. Actually, Irrfan Khan was a big influence because I was sitting at home doing very little at the time and wondering what should I do next? He was shooting nearby. He and his wife Sutapa had been my friends for the last 20 years. And he was very encouraging and supportive. He told me, "Come on write something. If it is nice, I'll do it." And if somebody like Irrfan tells you something like that, then you better get your act together.

How was it working with Irrfan?

Oh, it was fabulous. It was like a learning institute. I hadn't had the chance to actually do my diploma. I had gone to FTII for film appreciation but working with him was a learning experience. I still remember so many gems, and I still use them in my work.

Could you give us some examples?

So we were casting for a character of a modern office going woman for *Qarib Qarib Singlle*. And she was supposed to tell the protagonist *tumhara flat khali* hain why

don't you do some extra-curricular work? It was just for two-scenes and I wouldn't even think that Irrfan would bother about it.

Since the dialogues was bold, we were casting very hip girls for it. So, then one day, Irrfan told me, "If the visual and the audio says the same thing, you are repeating information, and that becomes boring. So if you change the visual like why can't a

"Star Bestsellers became like a Godsend for a whole lot of people with new talent. For me too, it was very interesting, because I stuck to my guns of working with new talent."

sari-clad woman say that? That would be an interesting tweak because the visual and the audio would be way different, and it would engage the viewer more." That made sense to me.

And that has become a mantra in my life. We always talk against stereotyping and yet we become stereotyped ourselves. So this is like one gem which has become my Bible.

What was the next step after *Madaari*?

Madaari got made and after that I had this audacious plan to start a channel called *Zindagi*. I wanted to go against the *saas bahu* tide that was on TV at that point. I wanted to get Pakistani shows to India. Way back, in the '80s, we used to watch Pakistani shows and they were very popular. So that's when I thought why don't I look outside of this industry to get something new - like new talent, new directors, new writers, new mindset, new thoughts, new narrative, new music, new everything... And I think it was a no brainer to look at the neighbour - we speak the same language, come from the same stock. And so I started watching a lot of Pakistani shows. What I wanted to do was to do collaborations and increase the talent pool. See the reason, in my opinion, the more variety that you have in the industry, the more our own industry is going to thrive. We can't be locked up with a few stars and few stories.

...I've always worked with new people. When we were doing *Bestsellers*, I was working with new people, when I was doing my TV shows, I was working with brand new people. So in that sense, my thought was, how does it add to our own talent? And how does one take a set of narrative from outside of our country and make it a part of ours. I feel that artistes have a responsibility of going beyond the story by trying to tell that story. That's another important thing that



Irrfan taught me that if there is a story and then there is the reason why you want to tell that. And with the channel *Zindagi* I really wanted to say that with the neighbouring country, you tend to have just one kind of narrative but art goes beyond boundaries. So that's why I went to Puneet Goenka, the Chief Executive in Zee because I knew that Zee was the place where the decisionmakers were right there. I told him the idea. I showed him some stuff to check and it was brilliant because it took him five minutes to say "yes". He said, "It's a no brainer. Let's

do it!" And that was that! Then we began working on it and we launched it. So that's the reason for coming to Zee because Zee encourages entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ideas because they themselves are entrepreneurs. And then subsequently, I wanted to bring theatre to screen - that was also a crazy idea. In television, you tend to follow a formula and it's very scary for anybody to go

against the formula. But by that time, I was done with formulas. However, I was lucky because I could push my non formulaic ideas to the decision maker. I got a great amount of support from Puneet Goenka. Actually, if it hadn't been for him, I would never have been able to do subcontinent content. Nobody's done that. And it was so beautiful for me. It was fulfilling at so many levels because you're meeting a whole new kind of mindset, a whole new kind of storytelling and challenges.

What about challenges?

We knew it would be a bumpy ride but that's okay. Why should everything be picture perfect. To be bumpy, because, because there is so much more to be learned. Yes, there were hiccups and roadblocks for reasons well known to everybody. But still we continued and I launched two original show completely produced in Pakistan which for me was a feat. Hopefully someday, art will have its own space without politics being all pervasive.

Out of all the projects you've done, which is that one project you are extremely proud of?

I am extremely proud of *Bestsellers*. Any time that I was allowed to do something with complete freedom, I'm very proud of that. It became a cult and it was very satisfying. It gave rise to a whole lot of new talent in the industry, and we continue to be friends to this day. And I would really imagine that this one show put out so much of talent who are the biggest, and the best filmmakers in the industry today. The next thing that I would like to be remembered about is *Zindagi* that was beyond storytelling. It was an ideology, and it is something which is what I believed in strongly and it goes way beyond content.

What exactly is your role as Chief Creative Officer (Zee Special Projects)?

I'm very fortunate to have a role like this, which is so sort of unique and undefined. So this role is interesting - and it can happen only in Zee - I come up with ideas and projects and I pitch them to Zee. Then my team and I work as a small entrepreneurial group within the Zee umbrella team on these ideas and back them. Just as I came up with the idea of *Zindagi* was backed ably by Zee. Likewise, I can come up with ideas, but I need the infrastructure to support me which Zee does. And that is what gives me joy that till today, I am getting an opportunity to pitch my idea, getting the backing and people are paying me for it. I mean, what could be better than that?

Are you planning to do more?

I have been really fortunate being a part of television, being a part of the OTT platforms, now being a part of theatre and making movies. So in that sense, there is no rush to do much more. I'm just so hungry to get my own ideas executed.

What about direction? Do you want to get into this area?

No. I love being a producer. I think a producer's job is extremely creative and satisfying. It's like birthing a baby.

How is it working with you?

Let me just put it this way - I have mellowed over the years (Laughs). I started out working as a teacher at Jadavpur University. While doing my Phd (which I never completed), I had to teach the undergrads. I really enjoyed it very much and at some point, I will return to it. I think I get impatient with people who don't do their homework. I remember Rupert Murdoch had come down to Bombay and he said something very interesting - "show me the passion, and I will teach you the trick." So I think that's a really pertinent way of looking at who you're hiring. So I like to work with people who have a lot of passion. What they need to learn can be taught - passion can't be taught.

So what's next for you?

Right now what is exciting me is factual content like documentaries. I haven't ventured into docu-fictional storytelling - that is something that's interesting me. But I like to do lots of things together because I get very bored of doing one thing at a time. I also have a great team. When you have a team of passionate people, they keep you on their toes because they are much younger and they come up with new ideas, new thoughts and it's challenging to always keep pace. It's challenging to remain relevant. And I want to always be relevant.

How do you balance your personal and professional life?

I don't have a personal life.. I want to eat, breathe, live my work. It's a privilege to be allowed to do all of this stuff. Nothing interests me beyond that. I'm happy to be single and totally immersed in my work.

STARRY

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Who nailed the
look perfectly?
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SASHAY



STARDUST ON THE GO

Are actors outside their shooting world as glamorous as they look on the silver screen? Can female actors in Tinsel Town be good friends? Who are the new love-birds in B-town? Team Stardust brings you a bird eye's view into the private lives of Tinsel Town eye candies.



Sister love: Katrina Kaif with sister Isabel



The Indian Michael Jackson: Tiger Shroff



What on earth is this? Shah Rukh Khan



Taking in the Rajasthani ambience: Anil Kapoor



The talented director with the talented actor: Sujoy Mukerji and Romil Chaudhary



Quite a poser: Madhuri Dixit Nene



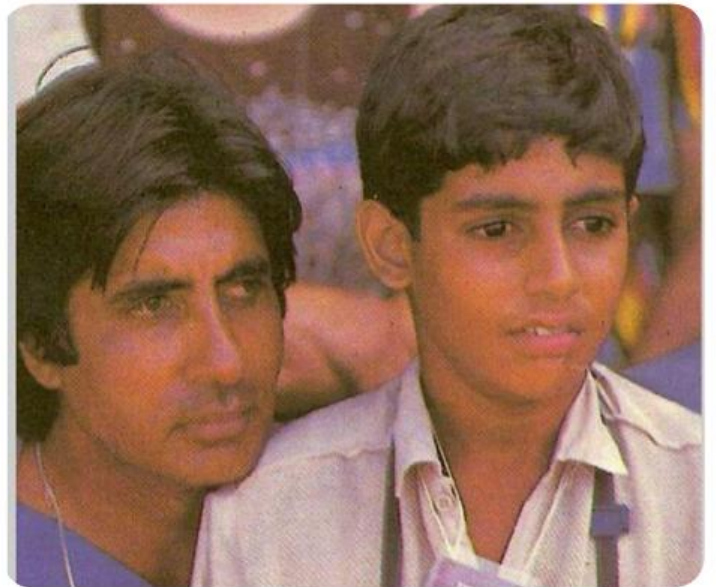
Thinking of India? Priyanka Chopra Jonas



Ruggedly handsome: Salman Khan



Shooting with care: Ajay Devgn



Big B with Little B: Amitabh Bachchan with Abhishek Bachchan



A little bit of skin show: Disha Patni



Posing for the camera: Raveena Tandon



Basking in the sun: Sara Ali Khan

//

The heart-warming response I received even though *Dil Bechara* was released online was just overwhelming."

– Mukesh Chhabra



Top-notch director Mukesh Chhabra who is also hailed as one of the best casting directors in Bollywood looks back at 2020 and introspects as he steps into 2021 with a new zeal.



The year 2020 will always be looked at as the year of the pandemic. It's the year that the entire human race had to stay socially distanced and confined in their homes in the fear of an unknown virus that could not be seen nor heard.



With its numerous drawbacks also came numerous opportunities. The opportunity to spend more time with your family, to take as many holidays at one stretch which was our lifelong dream, the opportunity to reflect and ponder over our lives and so many others. One such opportunity that we all witnessed as a film fraternity was the rise in viewership on OTT platforms.



Since multiplexes were shut and our main source of entertainment was a show on Netflix or Hotstar, we came to love this medium, which was in considered secondary up until the pandemic struck.

Most of the films were released online including my directorial debut *Dil Bechara* and a few shows and films that I cast for as a Casting Director. The heart-warming response I received even though *Dil Be-*

chara was released online was just overwhelming. I was really worried and kept wondering before the release if people would actually watch it if it was streamed online. But honestly speaking I could not be happier and blessed with the response I got on my directorial film.



The potential of an online platform is so vast that we haven't even explored it enough yet. I feel as an audience it made us more accepting and to some extent also falling in love with this online medium of viewing content from the comfort of our home/or anywhere and streaming it at any time we liked.

The fact that these platforms have so



many options we even went on to explore shows and films that we wouldn't usually watch. Apart from that, it has opened numerous opportunities for actors and filmmakers alike. Without the concept of a box office hit, producers too are willing to take the risk of investing in to seemingly new content. Actors are experimenting with roles and breaking the stereotype. The pandemic has been a boon in terms





“I was really worried and kept wondering before the release of Dil Bechara if people would actually watch it if it was streamed online.”

of consuming more content and offering more accessible content to viewers. From a personal point of view, I have binged and enjoyed so many series that I probably would have never had the time to watch on a busy work day. I have been able to identify and discover new talent through the content that I have been watching online. I have also taken the initiative to open of-

fices all over India, in different States. The online medium is perfect for me and my team to discover talent in every nook and corner, not only in India but all around the World. I have set up offices in Delhi, Lucknow, Chandigarh apart from my Mumbai office so actors don't have to spend money travelling to Mumbai and staying here at additional costs. They can sit at the comfort of their home and mail me their introduction/auditions. My team at the offices will help and guide actors about how to go about auditioning.

This creates more opportunity and I am very happy when I can source and give to the world of cinema more and more talented actors. It also creates a space for actors to reach out to us. We want to be more accessible to talent. I always say we only exist because of good actors. I have to keep surprising everyone with new faces and power packed performers. Faces that are from different parts of the country. I also want to make it possible for everyone to dream and achieve their acting dreams.



“I feel as an audience the OTT platform made us more accepting and to some extent also falling in love with this online medium of viewing content from the comfort of our home/ or anywhere and streaming it at any time we liked.”

Also, as a viewer I have been given an unlimited access to different genres of content at a very competitive price. For example, if I had to watch one single movie at a theatre I would pay around 500 rupees but, in this case, I can watch 10 movies or more for the same price or even lesser. This obviously gives OTT platforms an advantage over multiplexes. Of course, there's no comparison being made towards the viewership experience but to most people that is not an important factor.

So much has changed in regards to the way we are going about our projects now. I am just glad that everything is almost if not entirely back on track right now. With the necessary SOP's in place we have started shoot schedules too and work almost feels like back to normal. I think it's just a matter of time now and we'll be as good as normal. Till then we better stay safe and keep everyone around us safe too.

As for 2021 I am looking forward to more work, opening more offices all over India and all over the World and finding new talent.

“

I might be a Jazz person at heart, but I'm a through and through lover of good and meaningful music in general.” – Jeanne Merchant

Jeanne Merchant is a sheer delight to talk to. A music whiz, she's not just ace music director Salim Merchant's wife, she's also an exceptional singer and musician. Read on as she talks about music, films, being the wife of Bollywood's busiest music director and more.

Jeanne, you are a singer, pianist, vocal coach since the last 10 years and of course, the other half of music maestro Salim Merchant, how has the journey been?

It's honestly been an amazing journey on so many levels. I didn't realise then how being a musician could be more than just a professional career choice. Neither did I ever imagine that even after I became a mother, I'd get the chance to not just pursue my passion for music but also continue to share my knowledge, love, and expertise with students across the globe for years. While being a musical tutor and guide has been immensely fulfilling, I've also thoroughly enjoyed writing and now producing my own music and building an incredible home studio replete with state-of-the-art technology and stereo equipment; that I'm always exploring and am a learner for life. The fact that I manage to make the time for and attempt to do justice to all these various musical pursuits simultaneously ensures that I'm always broadening my horizons and being as creative as I possibly can. All in all, it's been a remarkable journey that will only continue to grow and flourish.

You are an exceptional singer too and can effortlessly pull off challenging genres as R&B, soul and jazz. Did you at any point want to sing in films more so as your husband is closely associated to it as a music director?

Initially in my career, I sang as a backing vocalist so I have had the experience of working long hours in various studios. I've been a member of the Indian Cine Singers Association and I've also done a lot of singing work in the world of advertising too. So, I've definitely experienced these challenging and demanding facets of the music industry in India. I am definitely open to singing in films but am really happy making my own music as an independent artist currently! The independent scene continues to go from strength to strength. The kind of talent coming to the fore is a reflection of the massive market and opportunity that exists. And, I'm glad to be a part of this burgeoning movement. The creative liberty and scope for experimentation that making and producing one's own music offers is unparalleled. It's an amazingly rewarding journey in itself - helping unravel and present new sides to one's musical personality.



Is there any filmi song or music that you wish you were associated with?

Well, I would say probably something with AR Rahman. The man's musical genius is well-documented. And, the thought of having the chance to watch him at close quarters - conceptualising melodies, creating magic, visualising how listeners would react to compositions and lyrics...would be an unforgettable experience. His creativity, bold experiments, seamless fusion between traditional and contemporary styles, ability to consistent wow global audiences, and product memorable work - these are all elements that I personally and professionally relate to. And, his glittering body of work is something I would love to be associated with.

What do you think about the digital platform? Do you wish to work on the digital platform any time soon?

I have already released three of my songs which are covers of Jazz Standards on YouTube, the world's biggest digital platform. YouTube is a great leveller - it doesn't matter if it's English Western music, Bollywood

“I have already released three of my songs which are covers of Jazz Standards on YouTube, the world's biggest digital platform.”

music, or untested music from independent artists. It doesn't matter if it's stand-up comedy, movie trailers, live performances, or influencer marketing content. It's all on YouTube! There's a market for everything and if one can figure out what clicks when and with whom, the sky is the limit for bankrolled big studios and budding artists alike.

Your album Yeh Wadiyaan has got good reviews... please tell us something about it?

This was a very satisfying project because it was my first album that I composed and sang myself. It was an album that I did with Lata Mangeshkar's company, Music Curry who were also very supportive of the entire project. I was also really happy with the music video, as I got featured as a mermaid alongside the hunky Milind Soman - a great personality and actor himself. This video is available on YouTube and has gotten positive feedback. The fact that I was able to produce my own music with incredible creative liberty and entertain diverse audiences was and will continue to be a joy and blessing.

“Initially in my career, I sang as a backing vocalist.”

I believe you went to the Trinity College and learnt jazz from maestros like Noel and Ramona Boswick... have you ever wanted to come out with an independent music album in this genre?

To kickstart my original music journey, I did

“But, the lockdown made me realise that firstly, students still need to continue their learning and secondly, that life can be so much easier tutoring students remotely across the globe. Technology made it simple to mentor students based anywhere in the world - from Kolkata and Singapore to New York.”

a cover of three well known Jazz Standards. One was “I got you under my skin”, the second was “End of a love Affair”, and the third one was “They can’t take that away from me”. These are very important Jazz Standards in the musical world of Jazz. I recorded them with some of my own improvisations with Jazz scats. My forthcoming songs that I’ve composed do have Jazz influences. These require a few final finishing touches and audiences would then get to experience compositions with a notable Jazz influence, presented in a very contemporary Pop style. I’m eagerly looking forward to releasing these tracks and bringing something very fresh and new to my listeners.

You are an accomplished pianist... can we hope to hear your accomplished piano skills in a music album?

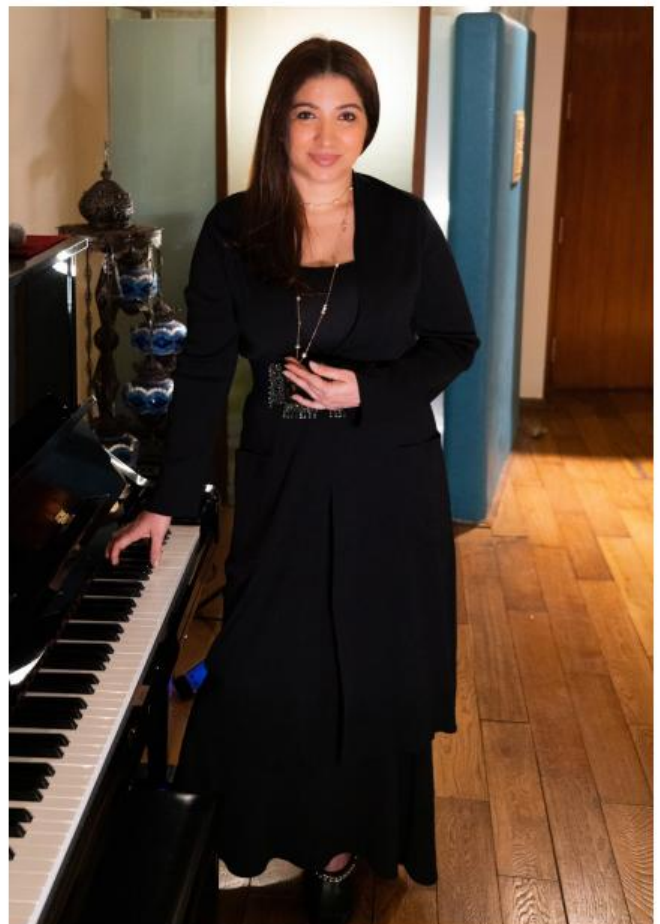
I have always considered myself a singer and songwriter. The piano has been my go-to instrument to write music on during this entire beautiful and ever-evolving journey. I use the piano to teach vocals, construct musical ideas, and work on harmonies and compositions. But to actually record, I would rather

collaborate with a professional pianist who is trained for just that. Someone who would bring his or her own expertise to the table.

I think that combination would bring two very different yet complementary skill-sets and talents to the fore. So, let’s see what the future holds in that regard!

Since you are an accomplished musician and so is Salim. Have you ever asked for each other’s opinion or advice on any of the compositions that have been made from either of you? Have you ever disagreed on musical aspects?

Salim and I always exchange our musical ideas with each other. We are honest with each other - and that extends to our music as well! Salim plays me his songs and I always give him my honest feedback. He really does take my opinions objectively and that holds true for his genuine and candid take on my music too. It’s great to have each other as sounding boards who only want the best for each other. Since our music is very varied, our feedback on each other’s work definitely helps to view things from another perspective. As you can see we always have each others’ back- creatively or otherwise!





You are also an acclaimed music/ vocal coach and has been imparting musical knowledge, singing skills and nurturing talent for over 10 years now. Your global students range in age from 4 years-old to adults which includes the children of several Bollywood stars and celebrities. Tell us a bit about this?

I teach with an open heart and mind - with the sole intention of wanting to impart musical knowledge to young talented students. They could be singers, artists, or musicians. I don't really choose my students according to their family status or celebrity quotient. I like to gauge a student's levels of enthusiasm and willingness to learn before I make them part of my music education program. So, their age, gender, nationality, socio-economic background, level of musical education etc. have no bearing on me taking them under my wing. I've even taught autistic kids and persevered with them, putting their parents fears to rest. Having said that - yes, I have students who are Bollywood celebs, actors who want to become singers, or those from a showbiz background. For matters of confidentiality, I have to maintain that information as private. But, my overarching belief has always been to identify, nurture, and guide musical talent

across the board. That's something that will never change. It's the least that I can do for an industry and community that has given me so much.

You have learned Hindustani music from Suresh Wadkar, please tell us something about this?

Learning at Ajivasan has helped me tremendously, especially at a time when I was making my own music for "*Yeh Waadiyaan*". I come from a Western musical background and I wanted to study Indian classical music to understand voice modulation and how to express some Indian inflections in my songs. For my album, I wasn't just the singer but also the composer of all seven songs. So, I really wanted to immerse myself in Indian music - to hit the right notes, convey the right spirit, and project the right vibe of Indian singing and compositions. In that regard, my education in Hindustani music was a blessing. And, it's something I will continue to build on as I explore new sides to my musical personality.

"I'm always exploring and am a learner for life."

During the lockdown, you have been remotely tutoring your students from diverse pockets of the world - USA, Dubai, and Mumbai and other parts of India... How did you manage that? What are the challenges you faced?

The lockdown has taught all of us many different things - some good, some uncomfortable, some logical, and some necessary! At first, I didn't think video platforms would be a great idea because I've always had face to face meetings with my students in my music room. But, the lockdown made me realise that firstly, students still need to continue their learning and secondly, that life can be so much easier tutoring students remotely across the globe. Technology made it simple to mentor students based anywhere in the world - from Kolkata and Singapore to New York. And, I'm sure that many of them may continue their musical education with



me long after the lockdown is over! I even have students based out of the same city who live farther away and so are comfortable to continue in a virtual learning environment.

Yes, I cannot teach groups and consequently have to spend so many extra hours in a day due to the one-on-one teaching that this arrangement necessitates. This means that I can teach only ten students a day as I cannot work for more than ten hours a day. But, it's still something and to see these students hone their skills week after week is reward enough! So, despite all these challenges, the lockdown has compelled us to adapt in ways we never thought possible, and, my journey in this regard is no different. The miracles of video conferencing have definitely helped make things easier on many levels!

Which is favourite genre and why do you prefer that genre?

It has to be Jazz, as that's been my love right from the very beginning. I used to wake up as a kid to my Dad playing records of all the Jazz greats - Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan - and thousands of other Jazz artists! So, due to this early exposure

to and love for this genre, Jazz reverberates in every fibre of my being. It's a genre that affects me in a very deep sense because of its versatility and the freedom in expression that it offers; in terms of harmonic changes, improvisation, scat, and rhythm. The fact that it has a lot of global cultural influences - African, Cuban, Spanish, and even Indian - makes it a very international yet personally relatable genre.

I love Jazz, but obviously I listen to all different of music too. I love RnB, the Blues, and certain Pop music. As long as it is soulful, I will connect with it, regardless of genre honestly. And, of course, with my students I do all kinds of music, not just Jazz! I might be a Jazz person at heart, but I'm a through and through lover of good and meaningful music in general.

Your all-time favourite songs and your favorite artistes?

I have very long playlists on my phone and it's hard to mention only a few! But, I can tell you that I love Incognito and a song that really comes to my mind is "Deep Waters". I love Chaka Khan. One of my favourite songs that she's sung is "Night in Tunisia".

"All my time before noon is for cooking something yummy for my family, or helping my daughter, or Salim with something."

I love Ella Fitzgerald, the First Lady of Jazz. I was only recently listening to one of her Christmas songs called "Sleigh Ride". I like Billie Eilish, Ariana Grande's earlier stuff, I love Dirty Loops. They're a very modern band that has Jazz influences with a lot of Electronica. I especially like "Hit Me". I could genuinely go on and on, since there are so many favourite artists and songs I listen to, but these are some of my all-time, all-season favourites.



Given that there is a rise of actor-singers in Bollywood, would you like to compose for anybody?

Well - of course! I would love to compose for anybody. There is actually something in the pipeline, but it's slightly premature to talk about that project. If the right opportunity comes along and I foresee an affinity, vibe, and project-fit; I'm more than open to composing for anybody. And, as I already mentioned, I'm also open to train anyone from the industry.

I have to say that my family is extremely supportive of what I do - right from my making and recording music to tutoring students remotely. Everyone knows about my husband, Salim Merchant. But, even my daughter is inclined towards music and the arts. So, in a lot of ways, it's a musician's dream on the family front! Believe me when I say this - there's always music playing at home! But, as they say - balance is the key to a successful and happy life. Which is also why I don't teach music before noon. All my time before that is for cooking something yummy for my family, or helping my daughter, or Salim with something. That ensures that I keep a healthy balance between both my personal responsibilities and professional pursuits.

What are your upcoming projects?

On the independent artistic front, I'm currently creating my new EP from some of the songs that I've previously composed. I'm also trying to put together some more original material which I've recently worked on and which will be out there in the near future.

“On the independent artistic front, I’m currently creating my new EP from some of the songs that I’ve previously composed.”

On the remote tutoring front, I'm trying to build my class into a group class with the help of technology. Due to my students being in different cities across various time zones, there's a time lag that happens on the video lessons. So, everyone ends up hearing the notes or tunes a split second later (which is why I don't do groups at the moment). This actually interferes with the timing - an element critical to music. So, this is a major challenge that I'm trying to address when it comes to groups.

There's a lot on my plate that I'm enjoying discovering and working on. And, that's what continues to make this collective journey so rewarding every day.



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Blast from the past



STARDUST APRIL 1994





A Soul-Stirring Session With Rishi Kapoor

-Sarita Tanwar

Here is what interests me about Rishi Kapoor. He wants to be famous. He wants people to talk about him. He wants people to notice him. He wants people to ask him for photographs and he wants people to invade his privacy. He is one man who really seems to be enjoying the flavour of fame. Of stardom. Of being a Kapoor. Look how merrily he floats in his Kapoordom; look how brightly he wallows in his Kapoorness. You can't imagine him whining or complaining about any of it; you can't imagine him wanting to be treated as a normal person. That's the glory of being a Kapoor. That's why you never see him behaving like other stars do. He has no pretensions. He does not make excuses for being arrogant. You don't see him whining and complaining about it, you will never see him wanting to be treated as if he were a normal person; or trying to convince you that he isn't any different from the other guy. Because he knows he is different. He knows he's a star.

And he has all the trimmings of being a star. He luxuriates in his moodiness, in his crankiness, and his grumpy disposition. And I can say with conviction that it isn't a cultivated act. He is a natural. So when he declared to me, "I am difficult. Very very difficult", it was no news to me. After almost three years of knowing the man I had the chance to do an interview with him. Although I devoured every article written about the man, somehow all his interviews ended up sounding the same. He never let any journalist come close to him. They were always kept at a distance and Chintu only made them believe what he wanted them to. "I have been in the industry for twenty-one years. How different can I get? There is nothing that I haven't spoken about before," was his feeble justification. But there was a lot more to the man. A lot that was to be dissected, understood, explained. Where was the real Rishi Kapoor? The man who could feel, who could cry, who was insecure and who could experience pain? Was he prepared to go on a voyage to discover himself? "Call me at home tomorrow. I shall think about it," he replied.



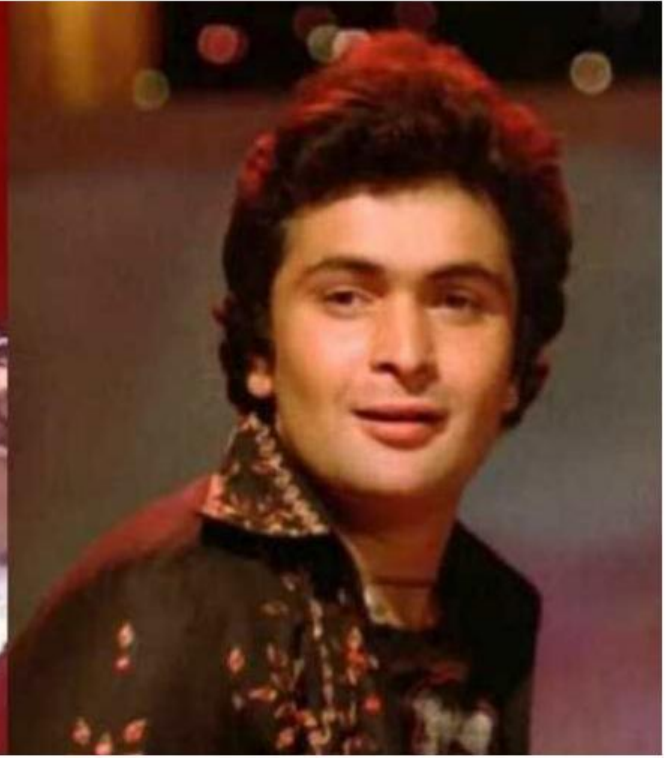
In answer to my call the next morning, I was invited to his tastefully done-up Pali Hill sprawling residence. "People only wanted to know about Rishi Kapoor, the star. That's how the poor Rishi Kapoor, the person got sidelined. It's time I brought him back to life. I owe him that much." That's when I realized that the time had come. For the unbuckled hero to lay open his heart. To evaluate his soul. To respect his identity. Later that afternoon, I left 56, Pali Hill a much happier person. Happy, more for him than for me. Because I knew that in just a few hours, Rishi Kapoor had emerged a more enlightened person. His search for self-analysis had paid off. He knew himself better than ever before. And that was his triumph.

Sitting comfortably in his glass enclosed out-house with enchanting view of green lawns in front with a array of wooden furniture and strategically placed mud pots we discussed what made him to private. And so famous. "Famous I knew I was going to be some day. It's in my blood. You have to revel in your fame to enjoy it to the full. I remember, when Dad was making 'Mera Naam Joker', he needed a young boy to play the central role in the first chapter of the film. He asked my mother if she would allow me to do it. I waited all day long hoping that she would say yes. She saw me being so impatient. Later in the day, she came towards me and said, 'it's okay. As long as it doesn't interfere with your studies.' I was like so thrilled. I ran to one of the studio rooms with my school-bag in my hands. Took out a notebook and started practicing my autograph there itself. Today, when I look back, I laugh at the incident. But come to think of it, my action said so much. Even when I was that young, I

"I ran to one of the studio rooms with my school-bag in my hands. Took out a notebook and started practicing my autograph there itself."

knew that signing autographs was the first step to being famous. And in my childlike innocence, I said here comes stardom. You know, Shashi uncle still tells me that every time my mom used to spank me, I would run and stand in front of the mirror to see how I looked when I cried. Like I said, that was in the Kapoor blood. So guess my reaction was just normal.

"To be a Kapoor. I'm not indulging in self-glory but I honestly feel that it is a great honour to be born in our celebrated family. You cannot deny that. Being born in a family that has served people for generations. In any medium of entertainment right from theatre to films, I think we've been the pioneers. Frankly, I didn't know the importance of being a Kapoor till I grew up. It was then that I realized that I could never behave in a manner that others adopted without thinking twice. One always had to think how it would reflect on someone from the Kapoor clan. People wanted us to be discreet. Have a little more grace, a little more sophistication, I may not be very well educated but I certainly do think I'm cultured. As a Kapoor we were answerable socially. People expected us to behave very well. Sometimes, you do feel suffocated trying to live up to people's expectations of you.



But then, that's the price you have to pay. Being a part of the third generation of the family had its pros and cons. The good thing was that I had a secure background. I didn't have to do bad films to survive. I was financially sound. The bad thing was that people actually believed that I was successful only because I was a Kapoor. That was frustrating at times. It is not necessary that anyone who is a Kapoor has to be an actor and a successful actor at that. Today, if I have survived in this industry, it's not because I'm a Kapoor. I have slogged to reach this position. I've fought for my achievements.

"People often ask me what institute have I been to. And I always tell them that I've graduated from the university of the Kapoors. I've learnt everything in this school. It is here that I learnt to overcome failure, hurt, pain. My experiences have taught me a lot. Why only this, I have even lived with the trauma of seeing my father have affairs outside. It traumatised me a great deal. Throughout that period, I have seen my mother suffer. I've even seen that part of life. And if today, I've emerged a stronger person emotionally, it's only because of the patience that my family imbibed in me. I'm a matured person because I have grown up evaluating the things that took place when I was a child. Maybe that is why I keep away from relationships outside marriage. I don't want my children to go through what I went through. I'm sincere to my work and to my family because I've experienced a lot from the lifestyles of my grandfather, my father, my uncles, my brothers. I've deliberately stayed away from things that could possibly affect my family life. The only thing that I haven't been able to stay away from is alcohol. I don't know how that has happened. Maybe because my father too was a big drinker, I guess.

"Both Rajesh Khanna and Sharmila Tagore were dying to work with my father. They were literally eating out of his hands. But he took two bloody nincompoops and mad a hit film."

"You know I've learnt a lot from dad, I've developed my fighting spirit only from him. After the debacle of 'Mera Naam Joker', he had the guts to take two bloody raw newcomers to make 'Bobby'. The required guts. That is what makes a great filmmaker. At that time, he could have taken Rajesh Khanna and Sharmila Tagore, the hottest pair in those days and made the film. It would have been easier for him. Both of them were literally eating out of his hands. They were dying to work with him but no, he took two bloody nincompoops and made a hit film out of it, at a time when any other man would never have dared to take such a risk. He always did what he wanted to do. Raj Kapoor would offer a film to anyone at any time but he always made films like he wanted to make them. At one time, Mr. Rajesh Khanna went around telling people that papa wanted to take him in 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram'. He even distributed press-releases to the effect that I was responsible for him not doing the film. That I had told dad, not to take him in 'Satyam'.



Do you think Raj Kapoor was a kind of person who would listen to anyone? It is a bloody myth created by the Khanna. The truth is that he was fielding day and night for the role and when Shashi uncle got the role, his ego was hurt. So he spread these rumours saying that I was responsible. Even Anil Kapoor went around saying that Dad wanted to make 'Paramveer', with him. I asked mom about

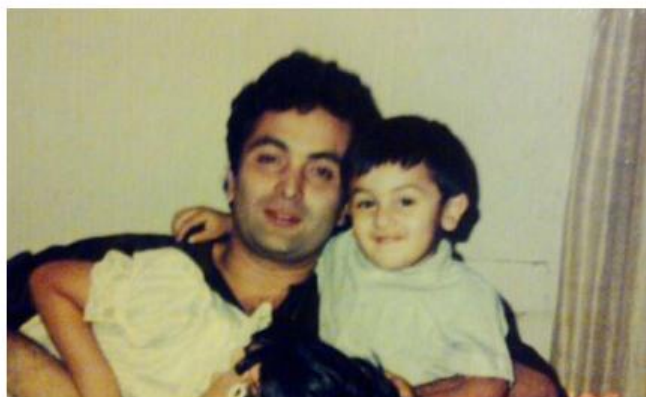
"Anil Kapoor went around saying that my father wanted to make a film with him. I asked my mom about it and she said that it wasn't true. People here just love to drop Raj Kapoor's name for effect."

it and she said it wasn't true at all. If there was any truth to it, she would know. The thing is that people just love to drop Raj Kapoor's name for effect. "Like I said earlier, Dad was a fighter. How many people know that after 'Joker' flopped, we were on the roads. Everything that belonged to us was mortgaged. And in that state of mind, he made 'Bobby'. Only Raj Kapoor could have done it. He was the genuine showman. It is that quality to fight to the bitter end that I have picked up from him. Like Subhash Ghai says, 'Rishi Kapoor is the only soldier in the industry'. That's because I've always struggled throughout my career. People say that Dharmendra and Mithun have struggled. I say that their struggle is nothing compared to mine. They

had to struggle to become actors but once they became actors, they never looked back. But with me, every time a film of mine became a hit, a new star came along. And when my kind of romantic films were being made, the action era came along.

"People say that I was born with a golden spoon in my mouth. I say that is rubbish. The golden spoon does not work in this industry. It does not buy you time. You can be a Kapoor till your first film. After that, you are on your own. Take my case. After 'Bobby', what happened? I failed. I flopped. I faltered, 'Zeharela Insaan', 'Zindagi', all those films came and went. After that I did not get work because I was a Kapoor. I was on my own. Where was the golden spoon then?

"Then there was a low phase in my life again. Once again there came a time when I didn't have any films. Earlier too I used to have two-three films a year. But that was out of choice. Then came a time when I didn't have even a film or two and that was not put of choice. Then too I fought. I remember the 'Saagar' days. I had only 'Saagar' and 'Nazeeb Apna Apna' at that time. I didn't have any other film. No offer. No films. Then 'Saagar' didn't do too well and the other film did. That's why I say, I've survived purely on my goodwill. The blessings of my well-wishers, my makers, my heroines and my music directors. It is the joint combination of all these factors that has borne fruit and that is responsible for me being where I am today.



"The credit for reaching the shore safely after the ebb in my career goes to Neetu too. She has been my source of inspiration and my strength in my days of despair. Dabboo says Neetu deserves a noble prize for putting up with me for so many years. I agree with him. I'm not the easiest person to live with. I'm very short tempered. I get angry very fast. I hate it if things are not done the way I want them to be. I fight a lot. I have a lot of whims and fancies. That's why I say that Neetu has been very understanding and patient. Had it not been for her, maybe I wouldn't have been here today. Even physically, although even today I'm slightly on the obese side, I would've been in a worse state had it not been for Neetu.



I mean I am not looking to become a Sunjay Dutt, to have a body like him. Or to have Salman Khan's jaw-bone but I would have really let myself go had it not been for my wife. And she knows me for what I am.

"Neetu knows that I don't have a roving eye. She has an edge over other star-wives because she is from the industry and therefore she knows the score. And if there have been rumours, Neetu has taken them with a pinch of salt. Actually it is not her reaction that bothers me. It is my children's reaction that I am more worried about. Rumours and affairs have rarely been pinned on me and when they have been we've laughed them off. I think affairs don't shock people any more. Everyone does everything openly as it is. Gone are the days when one needed to have affairs or to have link-ups to give him the Casanova image. In our field, a lot of good-looking men and women are working together in close proximity. So affairs, marriages, relationships are bound to happen. The situation, I'm sure exists in every line of work. I'm sure it happens in offices too. But it does happen a lot in the industry. I won't say it is an occupational hazard, I would say it is a welcome hazard. See, it can happen to anyone. It depends on the chemistry between two people and then it is up to them how they understand and compromise. I am not of the train of thought that one needs to have a lot of affairs to say in news. I mean, if it happens it should happen as a genuine case of love.

"Anyway I can't see it happening to me because the cells responsible have been dead for many years now. So the question never arose of 'what if Neetu finds out?' or 'will she accept me back?' Like I said, Neetu knows I don't have a roving eye. Period. I admire beauty like everyone else but it ends there. But for me to get attracted to a woman she has to be exceptional. I don't think beauty lies only skin-deep. It is the entire persona of a woman that matters. Only if I find the woman appealing then I'll probe for all the other things. Like compatibility and how we get together. But in the industry, well ... Anyway, all my heroines call me a true and bound professional and that is what I am.

"My only regret is that I haven't really been able to

spend as much time with my children as I should be. I try my best but it's still not enough. Otherwise, I think I make a great dad. Whenever we get the time, we go out together; they have late nights with me. But they are not spoilt. Unfortunately, this year they won't get a holiday because I'm shooting for my home production. But they'll understand. I also know that they are much more close to my Neetu. But that is understandable. Even I was more close to my mother. I think that's because

"People say that Dharmendra and Mithun have struggled. I say that their struggle is nothing compared to mine."

the big daddies are out working most of the time. "Work. That's my only obsession. Today, after being in the industry for so long, I'm still successful. Of course, I'm loving every bit of it. It gives me such a high even thinking that I don't have dates to spare till the end of '95. What more can an actor who's been in the industry for over two decades ask for? I have always been recognized as a good actor. But I have never received an award for my talent. I often wonder why. But that has never bogged me down.



I'm happy thinking that even after so many years, the audience still likes me. Actors are basically an insecure breed. They need to be convinced about the fact that people still want them. I would've probably thought that I was over the hill. I would have thought that people would not want to see anymore of me. I'm very conscious of the fact that I'm working with new girls. I'm very conscious of the fact that I'm probably over staying my time in the film industry. But the fact that I'm still wanted rejuvenates me and fills me with confidence.



It gives me that feeling that yes. I can still do it. "Even my dad was a thorough professional, and I'm proud that I and my brothers have had the chance to learn from him. From his experiences from his work, from the kind of films he made. We are all proud of the film that we made for his banner. Dabboo proved it to the world that we are the worthy sons of a worthy father.

"How many people know that after 'Mera Naam Joker' flopped, we were on the roads? Everything that belonged to us was mortgaged,"

Today, the industry is proud that Raj Kapoor's sons are keeping the R.K. flag flying high. I expect the same from my son as well. You know, I'll be the happiest man if my son wants to become an actor because then it will be our fourth generation in this line. But I know that this line is a very dicey place. There is no guarantee for success. That's why I'm stressing on his education. At least, he should have something to back on. I don't want my son to keep struggling year after year. Those days are gone when if one film of yours flopped, you had ten other films to rely on. Now if a film of yours flops then all other films that you have are shelved immediately. These days we have instant stars. And that is one reason that I want them to complete their education. I want my children to have a very sound academic background because both Neetu and I didn't have it. I have told them one thing. They may enter whichever field they want to. Only they have to excel in whatever they do.

"My father was of the belief that put the child in the water. If he swims, well and good. If he doesn't

then he will drift ashore by holding on to something. He always maintained that if you are not successful in whatever you're doing, find another form of livelihood. I knew from the beginning that whatever I would do, I was going to excel in it. Even if I had been a cobbler, I would have made a damn good shoe. And what has kept me going is the growing competition. It has kept me on my toes. Competition is healthy as long as it doesn't turn ugly. At one time, Dad, Shashi uncle and Shammi uncle were contemporaries. But they were never jealous of each other. They never manipulated to grab each other's roles.

"Even I have never believed in manipulating circumstances. I don't understand why people do it. Why don't they just accept things as they come? That's how I have managed to stay out of controversies for so long. They only recent controversy I was involved in was the misunderstanding with the other Kapoors. And even in that, I reacted only because it concerned my family. Anyway, that's a thing of the past. We've made up now. Actually, to tell you the truth, I never had a problem with Anil to begin with. My problem was with Boney. Basically, it was stupid things like 'you didn't come for my premiere and you didn't do this' that instigated the whole drama. It was very childish. We realized later that there were people who were fueling fire from both the sides. People would come and tell me something that they were supposed to have said about me. Then they would

"I told Boney that if we joined hands, we could devastate the world. Can you imagine the combination of two lethal Kapoor minds?"

go to them and say that I had said something. And because we never bothered to clear out the mess, things became worse. It would've have mattered with anyone else but I was really close to these guys at one time. So it hurt when I heard the kind of things people came back and repeated to me. I am very kaan ka kachcha. I readily believed whatever they told me. But there is no animosity now. I told Boney that if we joined hands we could bugger the world. Can you imagine the combination of two such lethal Kapoor minds? We can devastate the world, believe me.

"A lot of people say that I'm arrogant. But tell me, what is arrogance? It is just a way of saying that you know your job well. Your confidence says that you are a cut above the rest. Anyone who is arrogant has to be talented and successful. I may not be extremely successful but I know that I am a cut above everyone else. And that is why I am arrogant. Arrogance is a virtue in today's times. But I don't use my arrogance to displease anybody. I don't hurt anyone with it. This is me. This is Rishi Kapoor. It is not a put-on stand. I've been like this ever since the beginning. *Yeh mere tevar hain*. I'm a true Virgo by nature. I am very meticulous. I need everything to be proper. I get very finicky if things are not like what I want them to be, or to my requirements; which adds on to my characteristic which show in my relationships with people. I'm very short-tempered. I'm like a live-wire. Impatient. I can go into moods of depression without any reason. I want things to happen fast. I'm very impulsive. I can get into a rage immediately and become cool the next minute.

But I'm not a bad guy. I'm a very emotional and sensitive. But I think that any actor, who is a actor is so.

"I always feel that somewhere deep inside, the pathan in me still lives. If I know that someone is genuinely trying to harm my career, my children or my wife then I'll get back to the person immediately. I won't leave him. I'm a bloody Kapoor that way. But I can't have an aim in life to be vindictive to anyone. I'm a very social person. And I expect people to be nice to me because I'm nice to them. I don't meddle around with anyone unnecessarily. I could get a little nasty when I'm drinking but not otherwise. That is why I go out very rarely. Although my attitude is that whatever I do, I do in my own house. But criticism is welcome from near and dear ones. Otherwise you can't grow. You can't correct yourself if you don't know that you're wrong. But I know I've changed a lot over the years. I've watered down my feelings. I've changed with times. I have adapted myself to the workings of the new world. That's the secret of Rishi Kapoor."

◀ FAST FORWARD ▶



The pandemic caused sheer havoc across the world and 2020 proved to be a year with dire consequences. Bollywood too was hit hard by this vengeful year.

One of the film industry's biggest talents Rishi Kapoor passed away leaving his gorgeous wife Neetu Kapoor and son Ranbir and Riddhima grieving. Not only them, but the entire nation was also bereaved.

Rishi Kapoor was an effortless actor who aced in all his performances. He had always played the chocolate lover. But in his second innings as an actor, he got many challenging roles including the fabulous *Agneepath* where he played an out and out negative role which won him many awards.

On the personal front, he was the toast of the twitterati as his every tweet was witty, cutting and brutally honest. Indeed, Bollywood and the entire nation will miss this multi-faceted actor. Goodbye Chintuji though you will always live on in our hearts and on celluloid.

- Sumita Chakraborty

Star Cards



Multi-talented tarot reader Jyoti Bajaj looks into her magical cards and gives the 2021 predictions of stars. Enjoy!

Email: jbajab99@gmail.com



Katrina Kaif

Zodiac: Cancer

General: It is the year of healing and taking control of your life. You will be changing your social circle by letting go of some people and taking care of any joint finances.

Health: Need to take care of your chest area and any respiratory problems.

Love: I see a lot of misunderstandings in your love life, though this is the year you could finally commit to someone in the last quarter of the year.



Sanjay Dutt

Zodiac: Leo

General: Your social and work life will change in a big way. You will, however, need to let go of a lot of toxic people this year.

Health: Pay close attention to respiratory issues and anything related to the chest area.

Love: I see a very welcoming and happy home life especially with children and there may even be a relocation of home or office.



Deepika Padukone

Zodiac: Capricorn

General: Your focus this year will be on finances, joint finances as well as future investments. It seems like you are owed a lot and you now need to collect.

Health: You will need to take care of your bones especially the knees

Love: More than love I see family and finances as a priority, though love is constantly running in the background.



Ranveer Singh

Zodiac: Cancer

General: Many life changing events can happen this year. It could be relocation, addition to the family as well as change in the circle of people around you. A lot of people will be dropped from your life which is a good thing.

Health: Most Cancer sign people need to be careful of respiratory problems this year.

Love: As a destiny number 9, your love life is always in a state of bloom.



Akshay Kumar

Zodiac: Virgo

General: This year is going to be phenomenal for you. Many life changing events will happen all for the good. It will also be a great year financially and you will start something new which will be very successful.

Health: Be careful of lower abdominal and stomach issues.

Love: You will rule it.



Hrithik Roshan

Zodiac: Capricorn

General: This is the year you pay more attention to yourself and your finances. It is also a year of healing for you on many levels.

Health: Take care of any bone related issues.

Love: You are surrounded by love but be careful of people in your energy who may try to take advantage of your good nature.



Ranbir Kapoor

Zodiac: Virgo

General: This will be one of the best years of your life. Whatever you put your focus on this year will have resounding success in the coming 20 years.

Health: Be careful of stomach related problems.

Love: You got this! It's your year enjoy.



Shahid Kapoor

Zodiac: Pisces

General: Focus will be on you and finances. Be careful about the way you communicate; it may lead to unnecessary conflict.

Health: Pay attention to your foot area and injuries in that region.

Love: You are smitten - it could be family, love or children. I see total contentment in this area.



Sara Ali Khan

Zodiac: Leo

General: This year, you need to be careful not to get into a comfort zone. This is the year to broaden your horizons and try something new.

Health: No illnesses but be careful of heartbreak.

Love: This year will be full of changes. Many new people will come into your life and some may leave too but this year is all about new beginnings.



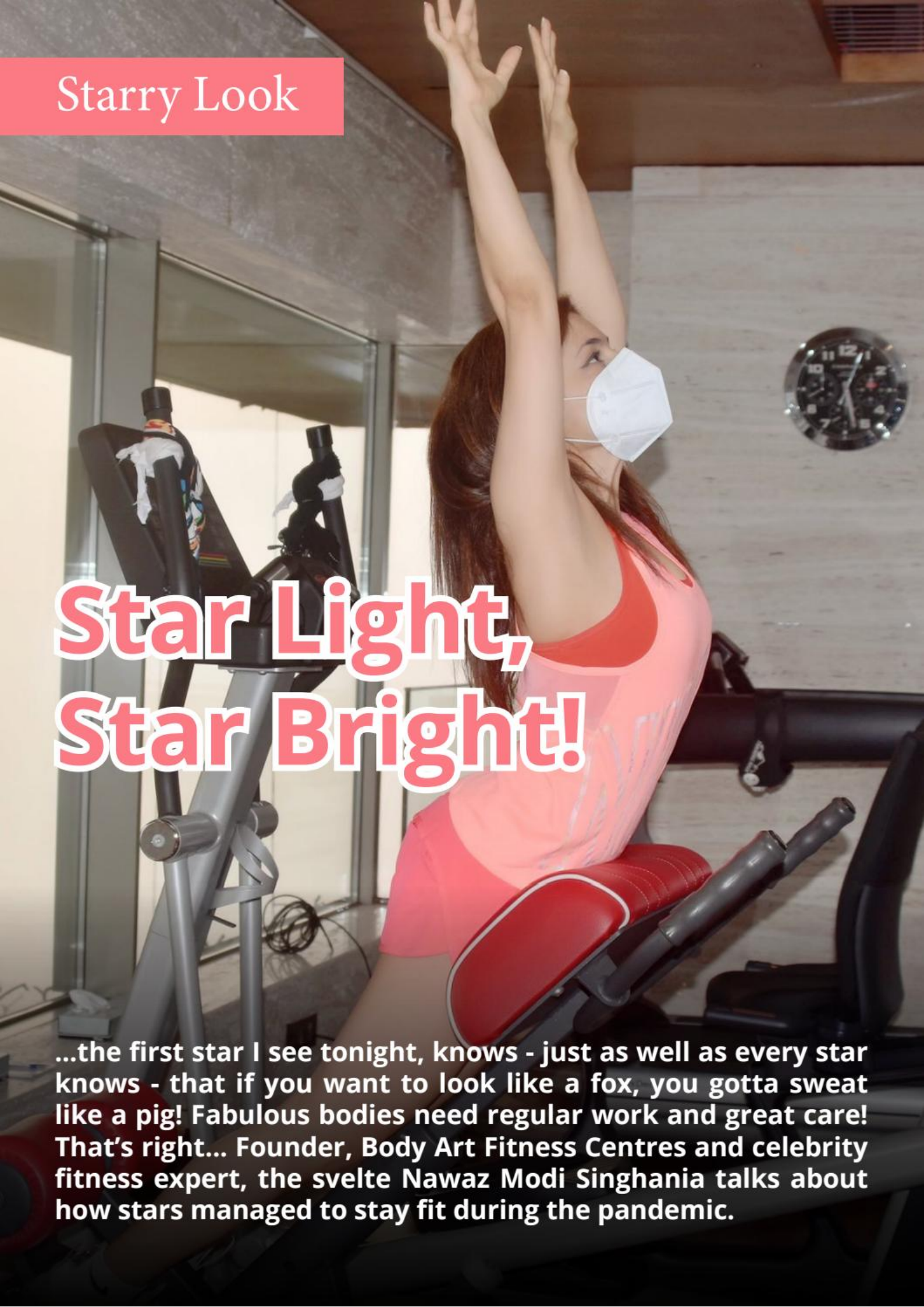
Shraddha Kapoor

Zodiac: Pisces

General: You will feel restless and want some change and movement in your life. You will get adventurous and try new things

Health: No health issues.

Love: Focus on the one you want to be with.



Starry Look

Star Light, Star Bright!

...the first star I see tonight, knows - just as well as every star knows - that if you want to look like a fox, you gotta sweat like a pig! Fabulous bodies need regular work and great care! That's right... Founder, Body Art Fitness Centres and celebrity fitness expert, the svelte Nawaz Modi Singhania talks about how stars managed to stay fit during the pandemic.

No female star can afford to look big on the big screen, just as no male star can afford to look so aluminium on the silver screen, so to speak. Covid or no Covid, that's just the way it is! No excuses will cut it; they still have to look smoking hot.

When Covid 19 first broke and India subsequently went into lockdown in March 2020, friends who are your industry-wallas gave me their inputs on how they were managing to stay-fit-at home, their take on physical safety, mental and psychological health, their own learnings, advice and more. Some of these people were B-Town actors / producers Juhi Chawla, Raveena Tandon, Sonu Sood, Gulshan Grover, Sonali Bendre, Raageshwari Loomba and musicians/ composers Salim and Sulaiman Merchant.

As lockdown gradually opened state by state, Maharashtra opening in phases and stages, much later as it was a highly affected/ infected state, the movie industry put its cogs to the wheel and restarted its engines. Shoots resumed, units got back to full size; no longer were there restrictions of just 10 or 20 people being observed. Fitness Centres and Gyms were given permission to re-open at around the same time. I touched base with some of the same friends to find out how it is that they were now safely moving out, shooting in large units, staying fit, remaining healthy, while Covid 19 still looms at large and the vaccine is still iffy at best.

Sonu Sood, Actor / Producer

"Nawaz first of all, thank you so much for motivating millions with your fitness routines and videos which are always highly inspiring.

Yes, with the gyms reopening the norms are very important, sanitizing your hands, working out in less crowded places and all of this is the new normal that we have to get used to in gyms.

And yes on location also though it's very difficult to keep social distancing on sets as in some scenes we have to have many people in one shot, and we can't keep the mask on specially in front of the camera. So yes, it's always a tough challenge. We have to keep on sanitizing ourselves and take as much care and precaution as possible. I feel way this way you can survive.



People have gotten used to it so I feel that they are not scared by the whole pandemic and with that slackness, numbers can rise. So it's super important to still follow those safety norms.

I'm sure with your fitness tips you are definitely inspiring others to stay safe specially in the gym. Keep spreading the right message about fitness, working out safely and keep the good work going on Nawaz; I'm so, so proud of you. God bless."



Gulshan Grover

"Lockdown forcibly taught me how to stay fit at home.

Prior to lockdown, virtually every evening I used various methods to reach the gym at 8 pm and till 10 pm I was not really available to the world.

With lockdown and fear all that stopped.

I relied on fitness experts and friends like Nawaz Modi Singhania's advice and new ways to workout at home. With no gym at home, free hand and unconventional workouts suggested by Nawaz in her videos were very useful. Well, by running for hours in my living room I have made various cracks in the Italian marble.

Now that gym are open, I must confess I am still very scared to use the gym equipment and be in a closed workout environment. With passing of time, slowly all the fears will diminish.

As I can't live without a gym workout, in due course of time either I am going to build a

gym at home or will end up going to the gym - to that gym where the word 'Sensitised' is not used just to let you feel less fearful, but they actually sensitise it.

I am also of the opinion that we must now make gyms which have a bit of outdoor also.

I'm reminded of a gym in my dear friend Mithun Chakraverty's hotel .

Many years back I landed at his hotel in Ooty in the night when Mitthun called me and said see you in the morning at the gym; we will catch up there.

Next morning I was expecting to be ushered into a fancy air-conditioned hall but was surprised to be escorted in a green, tree-filled area and there was Mithun doing bench presses under a tree. It was an open gym in green woods.

Initially I rejected it but slowly got used to working out every day amongst greenery."



Kunal Kohli, Film Maker

"I recently ventured into a gym in Soho house, not to work out, just to see what they were doing to stay safe. A lot of safety norms were in place. Many gyms are restricting the number of people coming in. But I think the one thing that people need to do is every time that they use a machine, a dumbbell or anything, they need to immediately sanitize that machine themselves and of course clean their hands before they move on to the next machine.

In between sets they should try not to get up from that machine and move around the gym, as probably people used to. They should stay on that machine during their brief rest period between sets, and sanitize it themselves before and after using the machine. They should completely limit / stop using showers in the gym because that is obviously too common an area which reeks of transmission risk; then of course carry your own towel - do not use gym towels. Gym should give only disposable napkins, tissues, paper towels -

nothing made of cloth.

I have shot for a film with a smaller unit of about 75 people, where otherwise we would have been about 150. At one level it feels good, because we are shooting with a leaner crew and on the other hand you feel bad because you have not given re-employment to so many other people. We have cut back on the number of people we would hire, which does help the budget of that particular film, doesn't help the industry per se. We created a bubble ensuring that everyone on the set wore masks, we had individual seating places for lunch, disposable cutlery and crockery which of course is a must. I think disposable cutlery, crockery in all public places should become the norm. Wherever there is too much touching and handling, that must reduce, whether it's a gym or it's regular life or the workplace. That is the key and how we control matters going ahead in the unlock-down."

Yes life has gone back to a larger level of normalcy but it is still very scary, because the cases have still not gone down. I did a test before I came to London where I currently am at and I was talking to the guy who came to do the test. I asked him, "Have the cases gone down or has the testing gone down?" He said that the testing has gone down and people are now testing mostly if they need to travel because it was needed. He said the cases have gone down as well, but it is a lot to do a lot with the testing going down. This is a huge warning sign. We need to keep our guards up, we need to understand that the unlock down has happened because of economic reasons and not because Covid is gone. It is

nowhere near gone as yet. We have seen a lot of celebrities, politicians, people in the news getting it and that should serve as an ample warning that we still need to be very, very careful, and only venture out for necessities of life and work. Rest everything we should do from home if we can. Health and fitness rules must stay the same as during lockdown.

My advise to people is continue to be safe. You can't drop your guard for one second, because the moment you drop your guard you never know where the virus is lurking, resting, sitting on some door knob, handle, glass, on crockery /cutlery, currency, hiding and waiting. This is what we have to be hyper vigilant about.



Nawaz Speaks.....

Let's examine why Fitness Centres are unsafe and along with it, look at appropriate precaution which can be taken to put safety first and foremost.

1 Specially during Cardio activities (treadmill, cycle, elliptical, stair climber, ski machine), people breathe hard, exhaling forcefully, often through the mouth rather than from the nose. Exercisers do this as a far greater volume of air is expelled from the lungs through the mouth, rather than through the nose, which makes it more conducive to exercise – but also easier to spread this virus. With a lot of people puffing and panting around, the more one exhales

forcefully, the further the virus particles will fly.

– Ensure a strict, clean 12 feet distance from each individual in the Gym at all times during Cardio activities without fail. This is also a Government directive. For other exercises, 6 feet distance from the next individual is the acceptable safe distance. The Arogya Setu App has been suggested by the Government guidelines which helps the user assess their risk levels in a particular environment.

2 While getting into cardiovascular exercise it feels very suffocating and stifling to have to wear even a regular mask, leave alone an N-95 mask. One can feel extremely faint as a result. The tendency therefore is to pull the mask off your nose and mouth when actually working out.

- Suggest to the Gym Management that all Cardio equipment (such as Treadmills, Cycles, Ellipticals, Ski Machines, Stair Climbers, etc) be made to face a wall side (rather than the Gym centre side). Lighter masks can be worn, but a mask is a must around both the nose and the mouth anytime you are in a Fitness Centre. Fitness Centres are advised to provide masks, sanitizers and gloves to all patrons and encourage their constant use.

3 Many diseases are spread through sweat, making Fitness Centres and Gyms again a precarious and unsafe place to be in.

- Each Gym user ought to carry their own floor mat and their own fresh towel, to be used under them on Gym equipment where they are to sit or lie down. This equipment must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized before the next person uses it.

4 With the virus surviving longest on metal, and with most gym equipment being made of metal, here again is another recipe for disaster.

- Each Gym's Management must ensure thorough cleaning and adequate sterilizing of all equipment post single member usage and before the next member accesses the same. Member's can additionally assume responsibility to check on this, or even re-sanitize touch points of equipment themselves that they'll be next using.



5 Even with correct sanitization and hygiene protocols in place, as people wait for equipment to become free to use it, and cleaners in between trying to maintain levels of hygiene, it's easy to see how this leaves scope for error in many ways.

- In your own best interest, be a little patient with cleaners so that they don't rush this job which is then inadequately carried out, to your own detriment. Gym Management might use signs on used equipment saying this equipment has just been used and will be sanitized shortly,



so next user will abstain from using it immediately. Once house-keeping staff have sanitized the same, they can remove the sign from the equipment.

6 With most Fitness Centres being air-conditioned, the same air is circulating around, making the environment that much more unsafe.

- If and where possible, keep doors and windows open instead. Try and have the maximum ventilation. If outside areas are available, lighter, smaller equipment or exercise accessories such as balls, resistance bands / tubes can be used there. AC temperatures have been recommended to be kept between 24-30°C with a humidity range of between 40 - 70%.

7 Common toilets, shower facilities and locker rooms which are shared in Fitness Centres, again further the potential for transmission.

- Avoid using any such public facilities for any reason. Plan yourself accordingly to have used your restroom at home just before leaving for the Gym, so that the need doesn't arise.

8 Remember that those who are asymptomatic - who have the Covid 19 but who look and feel fine - will also be working out in the Fitness Centre, so they could spread it to others regardless.

- Adopt all safety measures detailed in this article to protect yourself against asymptomatic patients the best that you can. Anyone with symptoms, even if they are related to just an allergy, is best denied entry by the Management at this time.

9 Temperature checks upon entry into the Fitness Centre won't pull out someone who has more recently contracted the Covid 19,

nor does everyone who is Covid 19 positive have the symptom of fever, even if they are not asymptomatic!

– Yes. This is only one of the checks and may not do the job. Pulse Oxymeters should additionally be used in every Gym and anyone with an Oxygen saturation level of below 95% should not be permitted to exercise and should seek medical advice. The pulse rate is also an important parameter to keep a watch on.

10 Dustbins are high transmission areas.

– Dustbins should be bigger, have a trash bag inside of it, always have a cover which is foot operated. Housekeeping should be trained to handle and dispose of the trash very safely and effectively.

11 There would be a major rush at Fitness Centres since they have more recently re-opened and therefore there would be a sudden spike in cases!

– Pre-booking workout slots has to be insisted upon by the Management. Giving out 45 minute slots with a 15 minute cleaning period to complete each hour would allow for good staggering of members and great management of controlling the numbers.

13 Outside shoes would bring in the virus that would cover the Gym floor that members would even be sitting or lying down upon, aside from the fact that in some exercises the shoes are being touched (such as in the Quadricep Stretch and the Hamstring Stretch) while in others they need to be removed! All this increases transmission risk to astronomical levels!

– Members should be encouraged to give their Gym shoes a shoe bath in

sanitising trays provided at the Fitness Centres. Even the tops of the shoes should be sprayed down with sanitizer using a diffuser type of spray for even coverage. No exercises should be done ideally on the floor. They should all be done higher up sitting on a bench. All exercises where shoes are removed, are best avoided at this time. All exercises where one has to touch the shoes can be modified by the Trainers to ensure that that shoes are not touched.

12 Everyone's not well acquainted with all of these safety rules and protocols and inadvertently could therefore increase the risk of transmission to themselves and others.

– Special caution to high risk populations, those who are obese, those who have co-morbidities, the elderly - Stay-at-home workouts offer so many things that you can do from the safety and comfort of your own home. Follow my social media handles for a ton of ideas on what you can do while staying at home, safe but still healthy and fit. Amongst many other benefits of working out, you'll improve upon your immunity and keep the heart and lungs strong – exactly what is most needed to stay safe. Fitness is not a luxury anymore – it is an absolute necessity. It is your lifeline! Through it all, be aware of your mental health and work towards keeping positive! Exercise is a fabulous mood lifter. It releases all the "happy hormones" such as endorphins, serotonin and dopamine.

Stars can't afford to look out-of-shape and out of it! Tough times don't last, but tough people do. Exercise.... Caution!

"Nachaniya is based on true incidents!"
-Sujoy Mukerji



There's a buzz about Sujoy Mukerji's web film *Nachaniya* which is being aired on Tamasha app this month itself. It is a pulsating story of a woman who decides to avenge societal abuse in the path of her career.

We ask Sujoy Mukerji who has written and directed the film, what excited him about making *Nachaniya*? Sujoy avers, "It is based on true incidents that have happened in Bihar and UP which I have read in the papers. I can't reveal more about the story as everyone has to watch *Nachaniya* on Tamasha app."

So what's next for Sujoy? "I am excited about starting my web series *Gutka King*, another film *Farz Ke Aage Kuch Nahin* and a Horror film."

Well, what we did manage to dig out is that *Nachaniya* is all about love, planning, game, romance and revenge. Total Entertainment is releasing it soon on Tamasha App whose co-founder is Mithilesh Bhagat. Sujoy incidentally, has made two award winning short films *Ab Mujhe Udnaa Hai* and *Zindagi Anmol Hai* and has won a whole host of awards including the Dadasaheb Phalke award for his short film *Ab Mujhe Udnaa Hai*.

Nachaniya is written and directed by Sujoy Mukerji under the banner of Joy Mukerji Productions. The title role is played by Amika Shail who has featured in *Mirzapur* and *Laxmi Bomb*. Salim Zaidi of *Bhabhi Ghar Par Hain* fame is also playing an important character. It also stars talented actors including Viivek Raaj Sharma, Shailendra Singh, Vaibhav and Neha Chawla. Sounds exciting, right?





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